

PHILOSOPHY IN CULTURE

A Cross-Cultural Perspective



EDITED BY

Mbih J. Tosam & Peter Takov

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Foreword

Every culture, as the way of life of an identifiable group of human beings, is underpinned by adaptation to a common environment, shared ideas, beliefs, attitudes, expectations and practices. Philosophy or reflective critical thinking and enquiry is an important element of every culture, as it is the means by which every culture provides itself with a coherent world-view and prevents itself from stagnating and atrophying. There is a multiplicity of cultures in the world which, considered from the point of view of individuals, form overlapping and intersecting concentric circles. The cultural diversity of the world is analogous to its biological diversity and both are valuable gifts of nature and nurture to human beings.

Every culture, simply as a culture, is neither superior nor inferior to any other. Cultures can be said to be equal in the same sense in which human beings are said to be equal in spite of greatly differing descriptive attributes and individuating characteristics. This type of equality can be called moral equality. It is anchored on common human limitations: physical, experiential, epistemological, and existential. No human being possesses the attributes of God: omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, omnibenevolence; none can be an experiential participant in all human existential situations; none is immune to making mistakes and none is immortal. Because of this, human philosophies cannot claim the equality attributable to human cultures.

Philosophy is an unending quest for the true, the good and the beautiful. Some philosophies might approach, if not attain, these objectives in a more convincing manner than others and whether they do or not is a matter of critical appraisal. That is why the philosophical mind is called upon permanently to enquire critically into cultural values and practices with a view to discovering and highlighting what possibly could be of benefit to humanity as a whole. This task has become urgent in our time, characterized as it is by the phenomenon of globalization in which cultures seem to be rapidly melting in a single pool. What philosophy will animate and carry forward a globalized world culture, since wisdom is evidently scattered in small bits in all existing cultures? As a single hand can

hardly tie a bundle, it goes without saying that a globalized philosophy, capable of moving forward a globalized culture, must be distilled from existing cultures without discrimination.

This book is the initial attempt of young Cameroonian academics to reflect critically on the theme of philosophy in culture. The book is dedicated to Bernard Fonlon, a great mentor, who was of the well-known opinion that if one waited to do something so well that it would be without any blemish, s/he would never do it. I warmly commend this book, with all its imperfections and shortcomings, to the critical readership of the academic community. Constructive criticism is the golden way for the growth of academic knowledge.

Godfrey B. Tangwa

Preface

This collection of papers examines the role of philosophy in culture. It is based on the assumption that there exists a necessary link between philosophy and culture. Drawing examples from African and Western cultures, the contributions in this volume show what role philosophy can, and has played in all cultures of the world—that is, a critical scrutiny of established customs, values, beliefs, practices and institutions. Every philosopher is influenced by one's culture, or socio-economic and political environment and/or situation in which s/he finds herself. Philosophy is always fastened to a particular place and time, race and gender, to the aspirations, fears, prejudices, interests and experiences of a people, although philosophical solutions emanating from some particular culture may be of universal relevance. Without a cultural setting, philosophy may not exist. Culture therefore serves as an unrefined material for philosophy.

All philosophical traditions are linked to a particular culture; begin from, and operate within a cultural context. This cultural and spatio-temporal nature of philosophy can be seen in the history of Western philosophy. Ancient Greek philosophy, for example, was a product of a critical spirit that developed in ancient Greece, which had not been seen in earlier civilizations like those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Culture is the depository of philosophy and all philosophical traditions develop within a culture as a confrontation to the experiences, beliefs and practices of a society. It is from this perspective that Bertrand Russell cleverly argues that philosophy is “an integral part of social and political life: not as the isolated speculations of remarkable individuals, but as both an effect and a cause of the character of the various communities in which different systems flourished.”¹ Philosophy critically examines our assumptions, clarifies our belief and values, expands our worldview, and provides a rational basis for the acceptance or rejection, revision and improvement of a culture. From this standpoint, therefore, culture is considered as philosophy of the first order activity.

¹ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1945, p. ix.

To make the collection diverse, though not exhaustive, the papers include contributions from philosophy, history, literature, and anthropology. The chapters highlight some of the issues that philosophy examines, debates, and clarifies within any culture such as prejudices and stereotypes, ethics, politics, education, the relation between the state and the church, and the environment.

M. J. Tosam and P. Takov

Introduction: The Role of Philosophy in Culture

Mbih J. Tosam and Peter Takov

“Philosophy is an integral part of human culture, and whether that culture is divided within itself or not, the study of it necessitates philosophy.” (W.T. Stace)

There exists a close relation between philosophy and culture. Philosophy is “so related and depended on its cultural universe that each genuine philosophy would have to grow and evolve from its particular culture.”¹ No philosophy or philosophical tradition develops from a vacuum; each philosophy is a critical self-examination of a particular culture. “Every philosopher necessarily operates against the background of some culture or other, whether or not that culture is his/her natal culture, whether or not he/she is aware of the fact.”² For instance, ancient Greek philosophy was greatly anchored on and influenced by Greek and other foreign cultures like the Egyptian Culture.³ Philosophy is a tonic of culture—a tool for cultural renewal. On its own, culture is merely a raw material for philosophy. Philosophy begins when individuals begin to critically distance themselves from their culture to question and confront established beliefs, customs, practices and institutions of their society. The question is: What is the role of philosophy in

¹ Theophile Okere, J. Obi Oguejiofor, Godfrey I. Onah, (eds.), *African Philosophy and the Hermeneutics of Culture: Essays in Honour of Theophile Okere*, LIT-VERLAG, Munster, 2005, p. 57.

² Godfrey B. Tangwa, “African Philosophy: Appraisal of a Recurrent Problematic Part 2: What is African Philosophy and Who is an African Philosopher?” *Cogito*: Winter 1992, pp. 138-142.

³ See G.M.G James, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, (available at www.jpanafrican.com/ebooks/eBook%20Stolen%20Legacy.pdf, accessed 03/12/2013); I. C. Onyewuanyi, *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentricism*, Nsukka, University of Nigeria Press, 1994.

culture? What is the role of culture in philosophy? Can philosophy help provide answers to problems within culture? What can philosophy do for African culture?”

Philosophy and Culture: A Symbiotic Relation

Controversy is one of the hallmarks of philosophy and one of the most controversial questions in philosophy is the definition of philosophy itself. But in spite of the disagreement among philosophers, philosophy is usually connected with the critical appraisal of our preconceived ideas, values and customs. Philosophy is a conscious and critical reflection on the ultimate questions of life and the world in which we live—a critical reflection on our experiences. It is the impartial search for truth. Philosophy attempts to provide answers to some of the fundamental questions about life, knowledge, the cosmos, morality, human nature, etc. Philosophy is linked to a way of life; a form of thinking intended to guide behaviour, to sharpen and broaden our intellectual horizon, to scrutinize our assumptions, and to clarify the beliefs and values by which we live.

From this perspective, therefore, philosophy promotes intelligent inquiry and self-examination, which help liberate the individual from the imprisonment of ignorance, prejudice, superstition, narrow-mindedness, and the despotism of custom. Talking about the nature and value of philosophy, Bertrand Russell writes:

As soon as we begin to philosophize... we find... that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have

*never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.*⁴

If philosophy is thus construed, it may be correct to say that the role of philosophy in culture is to question, appraise, and reappraise long-established values, beliefs, customs, and practices with a view of improving them for human wellbeing. Philosophy is latent in the everyday actions of people; philosophy, as such, is also the worldview that guides and maintains a culture.

Culture, on the other hand, is the whole composite of life, behaviour, beliefs and values, and institutions of a people. Culture is the totality of the way of life of a people, reinforced by “adaptation to a common environment, similar ways of thinking and acting and doing, similar attitudes and expectations, similar ideas, beliefs and practices, etc.”⁵ Philosophy is a profoundly cultural phenomenon; “it is part of the cultural experience and tradition of a people.”⁶ In this sense, therefore, culture is based on a certain unargued and unexamined, and sometimes biased, philosophy of life. A culture is rich if it is open to other cultures. Because no culture is complete or perfect, every culture is a borrower and a lender. It is “not only that culture that influences philosophy but... philosophy needs culture in order to be expressed.”⁷ The argument that philosophy and culture are closely intertwined does not mean that cultural values/expressions are commensurate to philosophy; but that culture simply constitutes the raw data, the laboratory out of which philosophers do their analytical experimentation. Hence, in this symbiotic relation, “culture needs philosophy for clarification and

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 73. (available at [www.cvjack.com/.../Ebooks\(ebook%20-%20PDF%20-%20Philosophy](http://www.cvjack.com/.../Ebooks(ebook%20-%20PDF%20-%20Philosophy), accessed 10/12/2013).

⁵ G.B. Tangwa, “Morality and Culture: Are Ethics Culture-Dependent?” in F. Thiele and R. E. Ashcroft (ed.), *Bioethics in a Small World*, Springer Verlag, Berlin, 2005, 17-21.

⁶ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987/1995, p. 43.

⁷ William Sweet, “Introduction: Culture and Pluralism in Philosophy” www.pc.scu.edu.tw/philosophy/.../01-Introduction-Culture%20and%20P, accessed 15/11/2013).

philosophy needs culture as its material for reflections.”⁸ As Onyewuenyi has suggested, “philosophy is a product of culture and an attempt to organize experience by means of thought—its ideas are shaped not only by existing state of social development and inventory of culture and science, but by the world outlook, material needs, vital aims and aspirations of diverse sectors of society.”⁹ From this, it is evident that both philosophy and culture influence each other. Philosophy serves as a guide for action. Philosophy is always tied to a particular place, time, and people, to their aspirations, fears, interests and experiences in the world. Without this cultural setting, philosophy may not exist. In the same light, K. Marx writes:

*...philosophers do not grow like mushrooms out of the earth; they are the fruit of their time, of their people, whose most subtle, costly and invisible sap circulates in philosophical ideas. The same spirit that builds railroads with the hands of the workers builds philosophical systems in the brain of the philosophers. Philosophy does not stand outside the world any more than man's brain is outside him because it is not in his stomach; but philosophy, to be sure, is the world with its brain before it stands on the earth with its feet....*¹⁰

Hence, all philosophical traditions are linked to a culture; they operate within and from a cultural background. It is in this sense that we can talk of American Philosophy, African Philosophy, Chinese Philosophy, European Philosophy, Kom Philosophy etc. The spirit of these philosophies may differ significantly in “their treatment of a

⁸ Nelson U. Ukwamedua, “Philosophy in Dialogue with Culture through Hermeneutics” *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 13, Number 1, 2012, pp. 184-204.

⁹ K.C. Anyanwu, “The Problem of Method in African Philosophy” in C.S. Momoh (ed.), *The Substance of African Philosophy*, African Philosophy Project Publication, Auchi, 2000, p. 62.

¹⁰ K. Marx, *Rheinische Zeitung* No. 191, July 10, 1842, Supplement (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/07/10.htm>, accessed 11/11/2013)

subject, but philosophy always deals with human knowledge, and the elevation of the mind.”¹¹

The Task of Philosophy in Culture

What is the role of philosophy in culture? To begin with, it is important to note that the role of philosophy in culture can be either positive or negative. Are there moments when philosophy is needed in culture and moments when it is not? Or are there moments when philosophy is needed more and moments when it is less needed (or not needed at all) in culture? Philosophy is needed at all times although the role of philosophy in culture is more perceptible in times of cultural crisis and during intellectual and social stagnation. It is needed, and necessary, at all times in order to guard against cultural complacency. For Richard Rorty, “philosophy occupies an important place in culture only when things seem to be falling apart—when long-held and widely cherished beliefs are threatened. At such periods, intellectuals reinterpret the past in terms of an imagined future. They offer suggestions about what can be preserved and what must be discarded.”¹² Philosophical analysis is one of the best tools for the evaluation of culture and in proffering solutions for a better society. The history of philosophy is replete with such sagacious suggestions, suggestions which have revolutionized our thinking about the cosmos, God, human nature, truth, knowledge, justice and the good life, and improved on the lot of mankind. Rorty offers the following example in the history of philosophy:

...when prayer and priestcraft began to be viewed with suspicion, Plato and Aristotle found ways for us to hold on to the idea that human beings, unlike the beasts that perish, have a special relation to the ruling powers of the universe. When Copernicus and Galileo erased the world-picture that had comforted Aquinas and Dante, Spinoza and Kant taught Europe how to

¹¹ Theophile Obenga, “Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy” in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 31-49.

¹² Richard Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p.73.

*replace love of God with love of Truth, and how to replace obedience to the divine will with moral purity. When the democratic revolutions and industrialization forced us to rethink the nature of the social bond, Marx and Mill stepped forward with some useful suggestions.*¹³

During such periods of intellectual and cultural torpor, that is, when a people begin to take their cultural values, belief and institutions for granted, philosophers step forth to make bold proposals “about what can be preserved from the past and what is going to have to be discarded. The intellectuals who are best at this get on the canonical list of “great philosophers”¹⁴ From the above example, it is evident, first, that philosophical progress and human progress in general are the products of discontent with the status quo; and second, that they are conterminous. What this means is that for any society to advance, its philosophers have to be vibrant in criticizing, re-examining, reformulating, and rejecting (if necessary), the shortcomings of its culture and long-established beliefs and practices. Philosophy, therefore, is “the razor sharp tool for recultivating, renewing and posting culture beyond the culpable trappings of obsolete traditions,” which suggests, further, “that philosophy and culture are co-ordinate perspectives.”¹⁵ For example, contemporary Western philosophical discourse, as Kwame A. Appiah argues, is a product of “a history of systematic reflection on widespread, pre-reflective beliefs about the nature of humankind, about the purposes, and about our knowledge of, and our place in, the cosmos. When these beliefs are not subjected to systematic critical analysis we speak of ‘folk philosophy’”¹⁶

William Sweet argues that philosophy can play both a positive and a negative role in culture. From a positive standpoint, general questions that a philosophical investigation raises may help people to critically examine a culture—“what a culture takes for granted ... what unifies a culture, and even whether a culture or way of life is

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁵ Chiedozie Okoro, “Philosophy and the Recultivation of African Culture” (www.unilag.edu.ng/opendoc.php?sno=3609&doctype=doc...&, accessed 12/11/2013)

¹⁶ Kwame A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 86.

worth preserving.”¹⁷ Philosophy may also “reinforce a culture”¹⁸ by providing rational arguments in support of a particular cultural practice. This can be seen in the defence of the Western liberal tradition by philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, Bertrand Russell, John Rawls and Richard Rorty. On the other hand, philosophy may challenge a culture “by challenging its values or traditions, or calling into question its claims to legitimacy, or casting doubt on such normative principles within the culture as ‘truth,’ ‘objectivity,’ the ‘good,’ etc.—or by advocating the values and norms of other cultures.”¹⁹ Philosophy could also show what is common (or universal) in different cultures and also serve as a guide to intercultural dialogue.

From a negative point of view, “philosophy (has and) could legitimize the domination of certain cultures, by insisting that members of non-conforming communities must respect at least the general exigencies of such a culture....” In this way, philosophy can “serve to reorient a culture, for good or ill.....”²⁰ Philosophy “can sometimes go so far as to deny the very existence of a culture (which we see when empires or ideologies, and philosophers that follow in their wake, refuse to acknowledge the presence of local practices, values, forms of social organisation, and/or tradition).”²¹ A case in point was the gargantuan philosophical and scholarly bias about the rational capacity of Africans which prompted the coming of European countries to the continent under the pretext of a ‘civilising mission.’ Moreover, philosophy “may even blind us to the richness and diversity of cultures by articulating and defending a vision of the world which predetermines what is to count as culture or what is to count as a value within a culture (e.g. the emphasis on the individual, on autonomy, on rights [(over responsibilities), and so on).”²²

¹⁷ William Sweet, “Introduction: Culture and Pluralism in Philosophy” www.pc.scu.edu.tw/philosophy/.../01-Introduction-Culture%20and%20P, accessed 03/11/2013)

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²William Sweet, “Philosophy, Culture, and Pluralism,” The Proceeding of the Twenty-First World Congress of Philosophy, Volume 7, 2007, pp. 3-8.

According to Sweet, there are four main areas in which philosophy can contribute to the study of culture. The first is concerned with the “methodological, ideological and historical presuppositions of culture and multiculturalism.” The second area deals with the way “philosophical discourse affects a culture’s “self-understanding” (e.g. how the philosophical perspectives of one culture have had a role in another). The third area centres “on how (and how far) philosophy might enable a culture to allow diversity and pluralism within the larger community.”²³ Philosophy can also permit us to see beyond our cultures and accept the contribution of other cultures to universal knowledge since philosophy allows us to question, re-examine, and recognise the foundations of our culture. An intercultural dialogue can make this possible. The fourth domain is concerned with “philosophy’s dialectical relation with culture—how far philosophy is a product of culture and whether that affects philosophy’s participation in culture.”²⁴

The Role of Philosophy in African Culture

In *Philosophy and an African Culture* (1980), Kwasi Wiredu asks: “What can philosophy do for Africa?”²⁵ This question is more important today than ever because we live in times of cultural crisis in Africa and the world as a whole; in times “marked by a certain intellectual anomaly... in a cultural flux characterized by a confused interplay between an indigenous cultural heritage and foreign cultural legacy of a colonial origin. Implicated at the deepest reaches of this cultural amalgam is the superimposition of Western conceptions of the good upon African thought and conduct.”²⁶ At this time of cultural crisis, the African philosopher today, more than ever, is challenged to think, imagine, and proffer solutions to Africa’s diverse problems, especially where Western solutions have proven deficient.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, p. 51.

²⁶ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996, p. 61.

Philosophy is necessary in African culture today for three main reasons.

The first has to do with the denial of Africa's contribution to universal civilization. Some prominent thinkers like Hume, Kant, Hegel, Bruhl, and Heidegger denied Africans their humanity considering them as irrational and uncivilised. As Lucius Outlaw has observed, "African and African-descended peoples were of little or no philosophical or anthropological significance to those who have been the designators, historians, practitioners, and mediators of the discipline's institutionalized canons of issues, figures, agendas, conceptual and methodological traditions, problem-sets, texts or text-analogues, organizations, and institutions."²⁷ Since for a very long time Africans did not have a say in the institutionalization of the concepts, principles and methods of philosophy, their thought was grossly misrepresented and Euro-American categories of thought, egregiously presented as the most authentic, the best and possessors of universal and exhaustive truth, was imposed on them. It should be noted that colonialism involved the complete "domination of physical space, the reformation of *natives'* minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective."²⁸ The African everywhere in the world was dehumanized, through slavery and colonization; and his/her body, land, resources, and "life-opportunities" (Lucius Outlaw) were ruthlessly exploited. The aim of this imperialistic approach was, no doubt, to institute a culture of dependence and underdevelopment wherever the colonialist went for their predatory mission. To do this, African forms of knowledge were dismissed and denigrated. All these have resulted in the loss of identity and the alienation of African personality. Because colonialism involved the mental and intellectual enslavement of the African, there may never be any genuine development in Africa, whether in the political, economic or socio-cultural domain without the mental and intellectual emancipation of the African mind. In this process of emancipation, the role of philosophy will be

²⁷ Lucius OutLaw, "Africana Philosophy"
(<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/africana/hilosophy>,
accessed 11/11/2013)

²⁸ Valentine Mudimbe, op.cit., p. 2.

preponderant. It is from the perspective of this Western-imposed cultural outlook that Masoga and Kaya submit that:

*The silence imposed on Africa's history needs to be shattered. Africans and their heroic struggles, victories, and creative energies need to be rediscovered, promoted and celebrated. Since knowledge is not produced in a vacuum, knowledge production, documentation and dissemination must reflect African realities not constructed through Eurocentric prisms.*²⁹

The challenge for African philosophy/philosopher is to deconstruct and reconstruct, or critically sift African thought from Eurocentric philosophical and anthropological misrepresentations of Africa.

The second reason is the deeply-rooted magico-religious or supernatural beliefs, values and practices which have become anachronistic, and which still continue to influence the life of most people across the continent. In most African cultures, these beliefs and values are largely unexamined and are harmful to contemporary African life. There is therefore the need to scrutinize these beliefs and practices.

When a society continuously and groundlessly stick to beliefs, customs, institutions and practices, even when such practices devalue and dehumanize the human person, on the basis that it is their culture, or as it is commonly stated: 'this is what our ancestors/people said/say,' they are under the tyranny of tradition, a worse form of tyranny because such beliefs are not held on any rational grounds, and unjustifiably override individual and creative thinking, they are bound to stagnate. Here, what is right is not what conforms to the principles of rational thinking, but what conforms to tradition, and what is wrong is what is contrary to tradition. J.S. Mill calls this the "despotism of custom."³⁰ According to him, "the despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human

²⁹ Mogomme A. Masoga and Hassan Kaya, "Building on the Indigenous: An Appropriate Paradigm for Sustainable Development in Africa" in Gerard Walmsley (ed.), *African Philosophy and the Future of Africa*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series II, Africa, Volume 14, Washington, D.C., 2007, pp. 153-169.

³⁰ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Ibid., p.96.

advancement, being in unceasing antagonism to that disposition to aim at something better than customary, which is called, according to circumstances, the spirit of liberty, or that of progress or improvement.”³¹ The lack of the critical spirit, of self-examination in most areas of human life is responsible for human stagnation in Africa. As Okoro argues: “The truth is that a people who are fond of eulogizing their past as glorious and unblemished will surely get stagnated.”³²

Thirdly, more than fifty years after ‘independence,’ most of Africa is still underdeveloped. A number of factors account for this—rapacious neo-colonialist forces, abuse of power, generalized poverty, high disease burden, all of which have been compounded by the adverse effects of climate change. The paradox also is that all of this is happening in a century that has witnessed the greatest advancements in science and technology, especially in the domains of agriculture and medicine. In such a global arena of Western economic, political, and socio-cultural domination, the role of the African philosopher to make suggestions or to guide us on what route to follow has never been more urgent. And, closely linked to the above reflection is the fact that Western-proposed development models and experiments in Africa have failed, and probably so, because these proposals were largely based on Western reductionist and positivist epistemologies which do not take African knowledge systems and values into account. As Sandra Harding contends:

*Development was from its beginnings conceptualized as the transfer of Northern sciences and technologies and their standards of rationality and objectivity to the South. Yet the greatest effects of this process have been to create de-development and mal-development for the sixty or seventy percent of the world’s citizens who are economically and politically most vulnerable. Development policies have primarily served to develop elites in the North and their allies in the South....*³³

³¹Ibid.

³² Chiedozie Okoro, op.cit.

³³ Sandra Harding, “Multiculturalism and Postcolonialism: What difference does it make to Western Scientific Epistemology? *Science Studies* 1/2001, pp. 45-54.

In line with Harding, Masoga and Kaya argue that,

This situation arises from the fact that the prevailing development paradigm has pressed the distinction between developed and underdeveloped into a dichotomy between good and bad. The underdeveloped societies of Africa including their people are treated as though they have neither validity nor integrity and may be violated at will. Their validity lies in repudiating what they are in order to be reconstituted into something new and better.³⁴

The West has never been truly dedicated to development in Africa and the rest of the developing world. The concealed fear is that development in this part of the world may create a stiff competition against the West. No society can genuinely develop with alien values. By this we mean a critical appraisal of the epistemological, metaphysical, and moral values which may stand on the way of African development, scrutinizing them from those positive values which may be helpful in our quest for development. Development in any society requires adaptation, changing, and in some cases abandonment of traditional ideas and ways of doing things. It also involves begging and borrowing values from other cultures. It is for this reason that Masoga and Kaya argue:

It is therefore, important that Africa must be truthfully studied on its own terms and to satisfy its people's needs through indigenous approaches. The philosophy and theory of truthful knowledge about Africa challenges all African researchers, academics and practitioners to unmask Western ideologies about their continent, expose exploitation, injustices and explore local knowledge systems that promote values which facilitate an agenda of social emancipation and equity among all sections of societies, women, men, children, youth, disabled and HIV/AIDS victims.³⁵

Philosophy everywhere, as we have already stated, is the (re)constructive critique of culture. Wiredu considers this to be the proper function of African philosophy/philosopher in African culture.

³⁴ Mogomme A. Masoga and Hassan Kaya, op.cit.

³⁵ Ibid.

Our view of philosophy as a whole, and of African philosophy, is that, without ignoring issues of universal philosophical importance, philosophy should focus on finding answers to the pressing problems that Africans are confronted with; philosophy should be a critical reflection on the African experience in view of improving on the welfare of the African people. One of the major weaknesses of traditional thought, as we have seen, is its lack of the kind of critique and argumentation which is characteristic of Western philosophy.

No relevant and authentic African philosophy can be detached from historico-existential and cultural reality. In this process of critical reconstruction of African culture, the African should be open to the limitations of their culture, and be willing to review them. In this context of denial of their humanity, and the domination and exploitation that followed this denial by the West, African philosophers must use their imaginative and creative insights “to project into the future, dream up ideal situations and work incessantly and tenaciously toward the accomplishment of these ideals no matter the difficulties confronting us.”³⁶ In this process lies the way to African liberation from neo-colonial and neo-liberal capitalist forces. It is also in this sense that the Eritrean philosopher, Tsenay Serqueberhan, contends that “...the proper task of philosophy in Africa is that of systematically elaborating a radical hermeneutics of the contemporary African situation”³⁷; a critical and analytic interpretation of the African condition.

The extraordinary progress that the Western world has experienced since the 17th century is a product of rigorous critique of ancient and medieval cultures which were found to hold values which were inimical to human and social progress. For example, the ancient Greeks concentrated in the study of nature, while medieval Europe seems to have wasted valuable time on the worship of God. Cognisant of the weaknesses of these periods, modern philosophers like Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes called for a complete

³⁶ Chiedozie Okoro, [www.unilag.edu.ng/opendoc.php?sno=3609&doctype=doc...\\$](http://www.unilag.edu.ng/opendoc.php?sno=3609&doctype=doc...$), accessed 22/11/2013).

³⁷ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizons and Discourse*, Routledge, New York, 1994, p. 16.

withdrawal from this “cosmocentric and theocentric”³⁸ conception of the universe, which they considered to have been the greatest obstacle to progress, and suggested a more dynamic scientific and critical approach where humans would become “masters and possessors of the universe,” to borrow Descartes’ words, and not simply worship and adore it. There is no gainsaying that the remarkable techno-scientific and social advancements the Western world has experienced is thanks to the bold and radical suggestions and guidance of modern European philosophers. An important reason for the success of Western philosophers is that they were open and prepared to borrow and incorporate foreign ideas and values. This attitude started with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece, who made good use of Egyptian culture and philosophy.³⁹ It is the place of African philosophers to follow this example without copying some of the excesses of that tradition like the view that everything in nature should be manipulated, conquered, and commercialized, that Western culture is the most authentic, advanced culture, and holder of exhaustive and absolute truth, and the view that ‘might is right,’ which is a product of the view that “knowledge is power.” This modern spirit has given the West a certain dominion over the rest of the world. In truth, the very ethos that was responsible for this extraordinary progress in the West may harbour the germs of its self-destruction.

In what follows, we shall attempt to bring out the views of two important figures in the contemporary African philosophical scene on what should be the proper role of philosophy in African culture. These include the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu and the Beninese philosopher, Paulin Hountondji.

According to Wiredu, African philosophers need to critically analyse some of the “...unargued conceptions about gods, ghosts and witches in the name of philosophy.”⁴⁰ The African philosopher, he argues, “must let his voice be heard on the question of what mode of social and political organization is best suited to our condition, and

³⁸ Chiedozie Okoro, Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, op.cit., p. 45.

he must take active part, indeed, he must lead, in the reappraisal of our traditional culture.”⁴¹ He contends that:

*...in treating of their traditional thought, African philosophers should be careful not to make hasty comparisons. Also they should approach their material critically. This ... is particularly important since all peoples who have made any breakthrough in the quest for modernization have done so by going beyond folk thinking. It is unlikely to be otherwise in Africa....the process of sifting the elements of our traditional thought and culture calls for a good measure of analytical circumspection lest we exchange the good as well as the bad in our traditional ways of life for dubious cultural imports.*⁴²

It is by critically engaging in African culture that we may achieve any meaningful development in Africa. Also, not all aspects of traditional culture may be indispensable in the quest for development, some have become antiquated. To know which aspects are good and must be preserved, and which are not and must be discarded, the philosophical process of criticism and “sifting” must be at work.

One of the main drawbacks of the traditionalist approach to African philosophy is its “insufficiently critical”⁴³ nature. It takes a position which seems to indicate that there are no aspects of African traditional culture which may be open to criticism. Moreover, the traditionalist occupies himself/herself only with issues in traditional African culture by completely neglecting issues having to do with contemporary African experience. Wiredu argues further that:

Traditionalists have tended... to restrict the concerns of modern African philosophy to issues having some connection with traditional African thought and culture. But the modern world presents intellectual challenges which may not all admit of such a derivation, and to abstain from involvement with them

⁴¹ Kwasi Wiredu, op.cit, p. 52. (our emphasis).

⁴² Ibid., p. 50.

⁴³ Kwasi Wiredu “Introduction: African Philosophy in our Time” Kwasi Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2004, pp. 1-27.

*on the grounds of a non-African origination is unlikely to prove a blessing to Africa in the modern world.*⁴⁴

Thus, for Wiredu, to engage in any philosophical reflection that may be relevant to contemporary African life, one has to be “both sympathetic to traditional (not necessarily traditionalist) thinking and sensitive to the imperatives of modern existence.”⁴⁵

On his part, Hountondji presents what may be considered as a revision of his original views about the value of African culture in the quest for development. His attack on ethno-philosophy, as he explains, was not that African indigenous culture could not have elements of philosophy, but on the way African scholars uncritically took African culture for philosophy—“i.e. a branch of ethnology mistaken for philosophy.”⁴⁶ They wrote about topics such as “Rwanda philosophy of being, the Luba notion of being, the dialectics of the Burundi... the sense of honour among the Wolof, the conception of life among the Yoruba, the African concept of time, African metaphysical clearings, etc.”⁴⁷ These scholars did all these reflections without posing the question of the universal relevance of such ethnographic, perspectival and particularist conception of philosophy. For Hountondji, “this new standard was one that was bound to hinder the African philosopher or, for that matter, the so-called primitive or semi-primitive philosopher from talking issues of a universal meaning and significance.”⁴⁸

In Hountondji’s opinion, we need to reject the “hasty way in which ethnologists and some philosophers” tend “to label such sets of assumptions” as those based on uncritical views about African culture, “as ‘philosophies.’ To me, these assumptions represented instead the initial material in relations to which philosophy could develop as a critical, personal, body of thought.”⁴⁹ Hountondji thinks

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Paulin Hountondji, “Knowledge as a Development Issue” in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2004, p. 529-537.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

that in contemporary Africa, "...what is often called traditional knowledge is still marginalized, and an important step forward would be to integrate it into the mainstream of ongoing research for the benefit of Africa."⁵⁰ According to Hountondji, therefore, in using African indigenous knowledge for African development,

Traditional knowledge should be tested again and again by the people themselves, reappropriated in a way that makes possible to make the indispensable linkage with ongoing scientific and technological research. What is needed in Africa today is not just to apply traditional know-how in agriculture while continuing at the same time to import from the West, whether in agriculture or in other fields, technologies which are poorly understood by local users. What is needed, instead, is to help the people and their elites to master and capitalize on the existing knowledge. This is necessary whether the knowledge is indigenous or not. The rationale is to enable the people to develop new knowledge in a continual process of uninterrupted creativity, while applying findings in a systematic and responsible way to improve their own quality of life.⁵¹

This new position could be described as Hountondji's moderate position as to what place/role traditional African culture should occupy in the quest for development and, of course, African philosophy, since the aim of any philosophical reflection or knowledge production is the enhancement of human wellbeing.

There exists, therefore, a symbiotic relation between philosophy and culture. Philosophy does not develop in a vacuum; it is always a product of culture and for any society to progress, it needs philosophy to critically examine its values and beliefs with a view of discarding antiquated beliefs, customs, and practices, and preserving only those that are relevant for the promotion of human welfare. From this, it can be argued that philosophy has the same meaning and plays the role in all cultures although it receives priority, and perhaps its methods of dealing with issues, are sometimes dictated by cultural biases and the existential situations in the society within which the philosopher operates.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Summary of the Chapters

This volume is made up of 14 chapters which examine the different areas where philosophy may be engaged in culture and culture in philosophy.

In “Human Existence and Destiny in the Culture of Secularism: Rethinking Traditional Cultural Values,” Peter Takov takes a synoptic analysis of the history of Western philosophy. He shows how in the course of that history human beings have drifted farther and farther away from God/Nature under the pretext of modernism or progress. The result of this alienation, he maintains, has been a reductionist and deficient conception of Nature and the human person in Western culture. All these have resulted in a secular or secularized society characterized by an anti-religious attitude, morality without God, the discarding of truth and absolute standards, a transient and unfixed human nature, economic, political, and techno-scientific turmoil, and anonymity of modern life.

In the “The Theocentric and Anthropocentric Foundations of African Ethics,” Mbih J. Tosam examines the debate over the source of African ethics. He focuses on the question as to what ethics depends on which has preoccupied philosophers in all parts of the world for several millennia. Tosam juxtaposes the views of the followers of John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu, pioneers in discussions in African traditional ethics, who maintain that religion is the basis of African ethics with those of Wiredu, Bewaji and Gyekye, who argue that African ethics has a humanistic foundation. After critically examining these contending views, Tosam argues that to base African ethics only on the religious or the humanistic perspective is to present an incomplete and deficient view of African ethics. African ethics is deeply depended on its religious and the humanistic foundations because life in the African cosmos is a continuum in which the community does not only include the living and real members, but includes the ancestors, the spirits, the gods, and the unborn. Morality in the African context, therefore, emerges from the metaphysico-religious worldview of the people.

In “Multicultural/Multiethnic Divide: An Interrogation of Politics, Identity and Culture Towards Transcending the

Multiculturalism Conundrum,” and following from John Rawls’ liberal philosophy, Fidel Tanju critically examines the multicultural divide in Cameroon arguing that ideally, multiculturalism would have been a positive value to be harnessed and exploited to the profit of the entire nation, but, rather, it poses a threat because of its abuse or complete misuse. Tanju argues that the Rawlsian idea of Public Reason, where cultural, moral, political, and religious differences are negotiated through rational and informed public debate, following the principle of reciprocity, may serve as an important antidote to significantly curb the multicultural/multiethnic divide in Cameroon.

In “Multicultural Education as a Basis for Peace and Good Citizenship in Cameroon,” Valentine B. Ngalim argues that multiculturalism offers a better educational alternative to a multi-ethnic society like Cameroon. Multicultural education nurtures citizenship education, “and attempts to connect the concepts of *Pluribus ad Unum* (unity in diversity)” to create an inclusive, equitable and just society where there may be peace and harmony.

In “African Culture and African Philosophy of Education,” Peter Takov attempts to weave a link between culture, philosophy and education in the African context. He argues that “education and philosophy are both cultural patterns of behaviour” and in this connection, African philosophy of education should not only concern itself with analytical reasoning and intellectual rigor as some African philosophers like Hountondji suggests but should also include other cultural genres of transmission of knowledge and culture such as initiation rites, symbols, stories and proverbs, and didactic games which have been smugly or derogatorily considered by some scholars as ethnophilosophy or pseudo-philosophy.

In “Secularism in the Post-colonial Cameroon State: A Historical Critique,” Michael K. Lang takes a historico-critical investigation into the secular machinery in Cameroon. According to Lang, secularism in Cameroon is a sham; in numerous instances, the separation of religion and state has been violated by the successive post-colonial regimes in Cameroon for the interest of politicians. For Lang, Cameroonian secularism has failed to establish a principled distance between religion and state. The danger of the violation of the secular

clause in Cameroon, he maintains, is that it creates a fertile ground for violent conflict as it has been the case in other African countries.

In “The Reality of Secularism in Africa and its Effects on Some African Cultural Values,” Nelson Shang contends that secularism threatens to displace some of our religious and cultural values. According to him, the relegation of religion to the background has resulted in a morally impoverish and incomplete conception of the human person, because an anti-religious worldview promotes a materialistic culture that glorifies fleshly and ephemeral pleasures and impersonal relationships.

In “The Phenomenon of Cultural and National Stereotypes,” Peter Takov examines some cultural prejudices—stereotypes, which according to him are at the bases of the many absurdities, misunderstandings and misconceptions, and even at the heart of some of the most violent conflicts in the world today. Stereotypes are at root of ethnocentrism, epistemological and cultural arrogance perpetrated by some societies over others. The problem with stereotypes is that they are mostly false, baseless and overgeneralizations about some groups - and are held by their cognizers in rigid and irrational ways. Takov argues that the cognitive distortions involved in stereotyping are also a source of moral distortions.

In “Hardwired Homosexuality: Towards Excoriating Some Contemporary Justifications for Same-Sex Marriages,” Fidel Tanju critically examines the ontogenetic, metaphysical, moral and political arguments frequently used to justify same-sex marriages. He considers these arguments as grossly fallacious and misleading. According to Tanju, human behaviour is not determined by biology—nature alone, but by an interplay of genotype and phenotype—nature and nurture. In addition to biology, our upbringing has an important, the most important, part in our personality traits. On the political and moral plane, the arguments in support of homosexuality and same-sex marriage are usually grounded on opinion polls, population pressure and not on rational, well-informed and considered (debated) justification. Following Rawls political liberalism, Tanju concludes that “Political truth is

contingent upon deliberation guided by Public Reason which must be neutral to comprehensive doctrines of any sort.”

In “Being Woman in African Culture,” Mbinkai M. Tazuh and Mbih J. Tosam examine some cultural practices, customs and institutions that negatively impact on the status of women in African cultures. Social conventions and culture have erroneously constructed women as inferior to men. Instead of considering the biological and physiological differences between men and women as complementary, such differences have been treated as oppositional and have been used to discriminate against women. When these biased and discriminatory cultural practices have taken place for too long, some women begin to view them as natural and even assist in their promotion and would resist any attempt at redress even when it is evident that they are being abused.

Landry Judicaël Kengne Tanga and Charles-Robert Dimi in “The Philosophy and Politics of Identity: Spinoza’s Regional Anthropology” examine the nature of the human person from a Western stand point. Spinoza revolutionarized the conception of the human nature. He presents the human person not as “an empire within an empire,” but as Desire. Desire expresses the ontological truth of being. This means that the human person is capable of self-determination and freedom. To desire is to invent values. The anthropology of Spinoza expresses the delicate passage of the human person from the medieval to the modern man/woman. The concern of Spinoza is to let the principle of immanence triumph. This Spinozian effort is innovative and opposed to the Western philosophical tradition which was characterized by the search for and integration of new knowledge. According to Dimi and Tanga, this positive aspect of Western wisdom may serve as a guide to Africa in its quest for emancipation and adaptation in today’s world. The intellectual reorientation taken by Spinoza in the 17th century on the ontological, theological, political and especially anthropological sphere placed him as a symbol of radical enlightened thinkers.

Finally, in “Anthropocentric Poetics and the Deconstruction of God/Man Binary: Humanistic Connectives in the Poetry of Thomas Hardy and Robert Graves,” Peter Foinjong Awoh critically examines the poetry of Thomas Hardy and Robert Graves arguing that the

poets' vision is deeply grounded on a humanistic atheistic philosophy similar to the atheistic humanistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre who considers that human beings are thrown and abandoned in the world and they have the freedom or responsibility to shape their destinies; and to give meaning and value to their lives. According to the poets, Awoh points out, the Christian God through His Divine intervention cannot bring an end to human suffering in the precarious world characterised by war and crime, poverty, exploitation of the poor by the rich, hatred, and brutality of human beings against their kind. Human suffering in the world will be stopped by human choices and not through a the same Divine being who seems to have lost control over the world He created, or to have become insensitive to the plight of His creatures, or is simply dead as Nietzsche suggested. According to the two poets, therefore, human beings have the freedom "to seek fulfilment through "loving kindness" directed to humankind rather than by paying allegiance to a supernatural being with the hope of recuperating spiritual recompenses in an afterlife utopia."

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Chapter 2

Human Existence and Destiny in the Culture of Secularism –Rethinking Traditional Cultural Values

Peter Takov

Abstract

This article, anchored by the ideological and philosophical trends that have since the past two millennia animated man's self-understanding and cultural values; and taking from the Socratic dictum "man know thyself," seeks an evaluation and understanding of man's identity and mission in the present secularized society. It proposes a "Re-thinking" of traditional values, not in an exclusive fashion of canonizing them as the best, but sidelining those that are worth preserving and devising a way forward for a consistent and authentic human existence and destiny.

Introduction

It was as far back as the mid fifth century BC, with the appeal of Socrates (469-399bc), "Man know thyself" that the course of Philosophy experienced a definitive re-orientation, from the cosmological preoccupation of the Ionians (Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes) to a man-centred consideration. Contemporary society is separated from the great Greek thinker, Socrates, by at least an active philosophical heritage of over two millennia and yet that question, "Who is man?"¹ seems largely unanswered and evermore urgent.

In this scenario, **Culture** comes down to us as a rich heritage with enormous generational changes: progressions and regressions as far as the knowledge and appreciation of the Human Person, his/her

¹ The expression, 'Man' is used throughout this work in a generic sense to mean, human beings (male and female) except where the context explicitly connotes otherwise. Same is true of the personal pronoun 'his' and its other derivatives.

origin, nature, existence, goal and destiny are concerned. Philosophy is, traditionally, fondly divided into some four epochs: Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Contemporary, notwithstanding possible variations of perspectives on this division.

Underlying every philosophical epoch and arising from every philosophical epoch is a cultural heritage marked by customs, beliefs, values and distinctive world-views that shape and determine man's very relationship with himself, others, and the world, with his beginnings and his imminent end.

The topic under consideration, "Human Existence and Destiny in a Culture of Secularism: Rethinking Traditional Cultural Values," seeks an evaluation of ideological and even philosophical trends that have since these two millennia animated man's self-understanding and cultural values: is man progressing in his task of answering that basic Socratic question: *Man Know thyself* or is he alienating himself more and more from his identity and his mission? Has culture been a progressive expression of the perfection of man, are more 'advanced'(time-wise) cultures a proof of growth or are we to rediscover the germ of man's highest point of cultural expressions consistent with his origin, nature, goal and destiny in the distant past?

Every philosophical or ideological trend has in a sense produced its own culture, which in turn depends on and is sustained by it. The questions which stand out include: How do these cultures affect the appreciation of man's existence and destiny? Is value system every culture absolute or are there some objective standards against which to compare and evaluate every cultural trend?

Any attempts to attend to these questions demand a fair knowledge of Man, and how he stands in relation to his origin, existence and destiny within any given culture and how the various philosophies have animated and continue to influence various cultures. The wide range of cultures, approached from various perspectives, prevent a complete study of all possible cultures here; however, a few representative hall-marks in what one may call an 'unending list' of cultures will be considered.

What truly stands at stake now is an examination of the interrelationship between culture and philosophy, in which interplay

is to be found the answers to these questions of interest? This entails answering other questions such as: **Is ‘Philosophy’ a ‘Culture’? Is ‘Culture’ a ‘Philosophy’?**

What is Culture: A Philosophy?

Along with Gottfried Lang,² we can distinguish six sheds of meaning of the phenomenon of Culture, by highlighting varying areas of emphasis:

1. Culture is an enumeration of aspects of group and individual behaviour as well as a product of both. The emphasis here is on the content of culture. Thus, culture is based on the life of a people and society and can thus be learned. Here, the role of symbolism (especially in language) and the historical depth of culture are stressed.

2. Culture could be understood as the history or idea of a social heritage or tradition. Ralph Linton notes: “as a general term, culture means the total social hereditary of mankind, while as a specific term, a culture means a particular strain of social heredity.”³

3. Culture is a distinctive way of life or normative idea and its consequences; that is, culture is a design for living, a whole way of life determined by the social environment.⁴

4. Culture is a means of solving problems, for satisfying needs and for adjusting to the environment as well as to other men (psychological approach).

5. Culture is an abstract, conceptual model of behaviour, but not behaviour itself. Thus we hear of cultural system, cultural configuration and cultural organization.

6. Culture is the product of human action. Culture results from the interaction of individuals and their environment, and also the summation of all ideas for standardized types of behaviour.

² G. Lang, “Culture,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, p. 523.

³ R. Linton, *The Study of Man*, New York, 1936, p. 78 – (quoted in G. Lang, “Culture,” p.523).

⁴ O. Klineberg, *Race Differences*, New York, 1935, p. 255 – (quoted in G. Lang, “Culture,” p.523).

Analysing these six variations of what culture is all about, one comes away with the conclusion that, “**Philosophy and Culture**” have a close and interdependent relationship: If Philosophy is a set of ideas and principles with which man purports to solve puzzles of life, if philosophy is a way of life; if philosophy is that motive that underlies human action; if philosophy, etymologically speaking, is that love of wisdom, wisdom that seeks to answer questions of the nature: Who is man, where does he come from, where is he heading to?; how ought he exist, what principles should he live by? If philosophy is the rational and critical inquiry into basic principles, then one could safely conclude thus: *‘Each culture has its ‘philosophy’ that shapes, animates and sustains it in which case a philosophy produces a culture or is born concomitantly with a culture; each culture produces its own philosophy and gives reasons for its perpetuity; every culture, essentially of human beings, comes under the scrutiny of philosophy, its objective and immutable truths, which belong properly speaking to the realm of metaphysics.’*

Man: The Architect of Culture and Philosophy

Gabriel Marcel, the French Roman Catholic existentialist, captures this truth very simply: “Man is the only being for whom his existence is a problem,”⁵ that is, the only being who can objectify and reflect upon his existence. This indeed is the beginning of philosophy, the puzzle of one’s existence and relationships with others and the world. This has been the basic philosophical puzzle behind the ingenuity that has marked the over two millennia of philosophizing, from Thales (or perhaps the very first human being) to contemporary thinkers (human beings).⁶

The following quotation from Gottfried Lang highlights the fact that man is a cultural being, the architect of culture: “Without the biological organism (man), in which thinking, feeling and acting take

⁵ G. MARCEL, *Problematic Man*, Brian Thompson (tr.), New York, Herder and Herder, 1967, p. 9.

⁶ Every human being is a natural philosopher. Everyone worries and ponders about the basic reality of being and the problems faced therein.

place, culture would cease to exist.”⁷ Pannenberg following Herder and Gehlen puts it more aptly as we find in the following excerpt:

Herder's view of man as an imperfect but a perfectible being led him to consider man as a cultural being and his world a cultural world. Unlike the animals whose very specialized organs and instincts enable them to adapt to their environment, an environment that they neither can change nor need to change, man has to master his existence by shaping his world ... And in cultivating his world man cultivates himself ... It is to this process by which man 'creates his world' that Gehlen gives the name 'culture'... In the light of this, Gehlen does not see any justification for the usual distinction between culture and civilization, a distinction which suggests that civilization is something added to culture. Both, in Gehlen's way of seeing them, amount to the same thing: 'man's progressive mastery of the world in which he lives and the result of such mastery. (For Pannenberg) he regards culture (thus understood) as the result of man's self-transcendence, his openness, his exocentricity (his ability to go beyond himself by objectifying his environment).'⁸

The above quotation is self-explanatory. Man is a cultural and philosophical being – the architect of both phenomena: philosophy and culture, their interrelatedness which has already been highlighted.

Another point that grows out of the above considerations is the whole aspect of Civilization vis-à-vis Culture. Simply put, culture and civilization are two sides of the same coin – both are the process and ‘expression of the outcome of the process,’ of man’s interaction with his environment at any given point in history.

From the above considerations we could then speak freely of: the ancient culture of mythology, the medieval culture of Christianity, the culture of the enlightenment, the culture of modernism, the culture of secularism, the culture of existentialism. Each of these cultures has its underlying philosophy (set of principles that animate it) and gives birth to its own philosophies (set of principles and manners of behaviour that arose from it).

⁷ G. Lang, “Culture,” p. 524.

⁸ G. Onah, *Self-Transcendence and Human History in Wolfhart Pannenberg*, New York, University Press of America, Inc., 1999, pp. 98-99.

The Special Place of Philosophy

When all is said and done, Philosophy lays claim to a special character of ambivalence: in a sense identifiable with a cultural trend (or at least interdependent with it) and at the same time transcends every cultural boundary (standing above culture as its queen and judge). Thus seen, Philosophy is aptly described as “*The science of all things naturally knowable to man’s unaided powers, insofar as these things are studied in their deepest causes and reasons.*”⁹

Every culture and its philosophical trends are evaluated against the immutable truths and facts of a broader and universal philosophical spectrum which concerns itself with those first or self-evident principles and metaphysical facts of being and human nature. These principles are unchangeable but have and will continue to judge every changing cultural and philosophical outlook.

This sets the stage for us to consider the hallmarks in the over two millennia rise and fall of cultures and philosophies with particular emphasis on the emergence of the culture of secularism. The questions in view are: Is the culture of secularism consistent with the trends that have gone before? What break offs? What way forward?

How did we Arrive here (Secularism)-Striking Cultural or Philosophical Trends Down the Millennia

Though not independent of each other, we shall distinguish for the purpose of easy assimilation, two world-views: the philosophical and the politico-social world views. Serious and real overlapping are thus to be expected.

The Philosophical World¹⁰

⁹ P. Glenn, *Introduction to Philosophy*, London, B-Herder Book Co., 1966, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰Most of the information under the heading ‘3.1.’ (and its sub-headings) have been gotten from:

C. Andrew, “Western Philosophy,” in Encarta-Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

The world has not always been the way it is today, neither has man always understood himself as he does today nor related with fellow man and the ultimate questions of why being?, why his existence?, how his existence?, what is his destiny?, etc., in exactly the same way— it has taken two millennia of shifts and changes in his philosophical outlook. For one thing, man's philosophical outlook determines for the most part his outlook of and participation in the world and vice versa. Let's risk the anticipation here: if Socrates were to rise from the dead today, he definitely will not recognize the ramification the dictum, 'man know thyself' has taken, nor will the Medieval (for the most part Christian) philosophers recognize today's secular and atheistic philosophies. How far has man gone down this road?

For the purpose of our studies, the following consideration of the philosophical world has a Western oriented bias, for obvious reasons. In fact, the secular trends have developed from there and now spread abroad, to Africa, Asia, China etc.

Ancient Philosophy

The Ionians

At the beginnings of Western Philosophy is often placed the pioneer Greek philosophers, Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, who are generally credited for taking that radical, that initial step of turning away from the mythological explanations of reality, customary at their time, to a more scientific one. They thus discovered important scientific principles - the permanence of substance, the natural evolution of the world, and the reduction of quality to quantity. For them, the following substances were primary and lay at the basis of all else: Thales – water; Anaximander - the infinite, intangible *apeiron* or the boundless; and Anaximenes - air. Subsequent science and metaphysics will definitely build on this. In fact, that journey of philosophy (which has today gone 'crazy') has just begun.

Later Ancient Philosophies

The Pythagoreans (founded by Pythagoras) were next on the scene: they combined ethical, supernatural, and mathematical beliefs with many ascetic rules, such as obedience and silence and simplicity of dress and possessions. They identified science with mathematics and held that everything was made up of numbers. Furthermore, they maintained that the highest purpose of humans should be to purify their souls by cultivating intellectual virtues, refraining from sensual pleasures, and practicing special religious rituals.

Heraclitus will next propound a world-view of constant flux – nothing is permanent. His doctrine on the *Logos* identified the laws of nature with a divine mind, a view that will subsequently develop into pantheistic theology of Stoicism.

Directly opposed to Heraclitus comes Parmenides for whom all things that exist have no beginning and end and are unchangeable.

The pluralists' version of Ionian philosophy, championed by Empedocles, declared that there were more than one irreducible primary substances from which all else originated, namely, air, water, earth, and fire, which were combined and separated by two forces: love and strife. In line with this, Anaxagoras maintained that all things are composed of very small particles of "seeds" which exist in infinite variety which are separated and combined by a world mind – thus his theory of *cosmic evolution*.

The atomists (like Democritus) will fit perfectly into this world-view and radicalize their conception of nature in purely materialistic terms – all of nature is composed of numerous indivisible particles called atoms. Differences in numbers, shapes, and sizes of atoms result in the variety we see. Thus, the difference amongst things is only a matter of quantity. Applied in the fields of ethics, politics, psychology etc. there emerged the first clear statement of *deterministic materialism* – all that exist rigidly follow, or are determined by physical laws. The influence of this on secularism will be championed by Karl Marx.

The Sophist first breathed the clear air of moral relativism. Protagoras, chief proponent, contends that there is no objective knowledge (demonstrable and impartial), but "man is the measure of all things," an opinion that has become *law* in secular society.

Socrates' philosophy is an apt refutation of the Sophists. He holds that, in matters of morality, it is best to seek out genuine knowledge by exposing false pretensions; we should unceasingly question our beliefs and those of others in order to seek out genuine wisdom. He even held that each man has within his soul the full knowledge of ultimate truth and needs only to be spurred to conscious reflection to become aware of it. We thus understand his dictum – “man know thyself.”

Plato is celebrated for his *Theory of Forms*, with his concept of the Absolute Idea of the Good, which is the highest Form and includes all others. This doctrine has been the main source of pantheistic and mystical religious doctrines in Western cultures. And also, he in a sense championed future idealism. Clear in Plato's thoughts is the rejection of a mere “pleasure-seeking” life.

Aristotle is very famous for his development of systematic metaphysics and his categories of being (substance and accidents), and also for his theory of the ‘unmoved mover,’ which was only a step away from the recognition of ‘God’ by philosophy, a lack supplied by Thomas Aquinas. He likewise stressed the uniqueness of man in creation (thanks to his rational soul, the substantial form of the body).

Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy saw the flowering of diverse views of life and the world. Epicurus (Epicureanism) – eliminates fear of death and increases pleasure to its maximum; Zeno (Stoicism) – while developing a theory of natural law, stressed that humans should strive to live in accord with nature; Scepticism – man cannot know the truth of reality, thus happiness lies in complete suspension of judgment; Neo-Platonism (Plotinus) – the universe emanates from the One by a mysterious process of overflowing of divine energy in successive levels; and man's highest good is to purify himself from dependence on bodily comforts and, through philosophical meditation, to prepare for an ecstatic reunion with the One.

The ancient philosophers could be said to have prepared the grounds for subsequent philosophizing, which will build on these earlier speculations for good or for bad as will be seen. The truths found therein about man's uniqueness and existence and destiny will find their highest amplifications in the Medieval Age, while the

degrading tendencies therein will be rehearsed and pushed to escalating proportions by the modernists and secularists. The call to return to traditional values which this paper makes should therefore be understood within these perspectives and thus the need to pick and choose.

Medieval Philosophy

The dimension Medieval Philosophy took is to be understood from the events preceding this age - the collapse of the Greco-Roman Civilization such that Western philosophers turned their attention from scientific investigation of nature and the search for worldly happiness to the problem of salvation and happiness in the *better world*. Immediately, St Augustine comes to mind with his “City of God” – calling all to live for the “Better” world. Prominent in the medieval era were St Augustine, the Scholastics (Anselm of Canterbury, Roscelin, Peter Abelard, the Muslim, Averroes, the Jew, Moses Maimonides, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas); and later philosophers like Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Despite their slight variations and diverse religious backgrounds, the main thrust in the philosophy of this age includes the following:

- God as the originator and end of all;
- The eternal destiny of humankind, to be with God;
- Reconciliation of Philosophy and Faith – their complementary nature;
- The necessity of Christian and virtuous living;
- The objectivity of truth and morality;
- The principles of natural law and conscience;
- The existence of ‘essences and substances,’ different from accidents;
- The hierarchical view of *being* and the universe - God sustaining all with man at the centre of creation.

Characteristically, the medieval era of philosophy was a sort of fulfilment ‘religionization’ of the ancient in its cultural, anthropological and cosmic outlooks. It brought to rest in God ancient speculations of the *Nous*, *Logos*, Unmoved Mover etc.; it gave an answer to the Socratic dictum – “man know thyself” by revealing

to man his fundamental nature different from all other beings and his special call to happiness in the 'better world,' thus rejecting Epicureanism. It likewise silenced the Sophists' relativistic tendencies with its insistence on objectivity, which also brought to naught the sceptics' self-contradictory affirmation that 'no affirmation should be made about reality.' This gives the early Medieval Era a prime place when we talk of returning to the traditional values (in the philosophical world) prior to the great deconstructions of Modernists and Post-Modernists.¹¹

BUT FOR HOW LONG? Man had advanced in his quest this far, only to make a devastating head-on fall down the cliff, revising, enkindling, consolidating and propagating the one-sided picture of reality that robs man of his true identity, while jeopardizing the principles of truth, religion and ethics in favour of a self-styled approach to reality oblivious of any objective and natural foundations. The seeds of such a tendency, which will reach its helm in secularism, could be found in some of the above highlighted philosophies of the 'Ancients' but more elaborately in the intimations of later Medieval thinkers such as the 13th century Roger Bacons who rejected all previous methods of inquiry and demanded for 'controlled observation,' launching the new method of the sciences. This interest in the sciences was re-enkindled in the 15th and 16th Centuries alongside a tendency toward pantheistic mysticism - that is, finding God in all things. The suggestion (true in itself) that the earth moves round the sun and not the other way round (Nicholas of Cusa, Nicolaus Copernicus), had untold consequences such as the displacement of man from the centre of the universe. Also, Nicholas of Cusa and later Giordano Bruno identified the universe with God,

¹¹Modernism is simply defined as that cultural synthesis that swept across the West since 1648 characterized by rationalism, institutionalism, formalism, authoritarianism, Marxism, and liberal pessimism. Post-Modernism on the other hand has as a basic tenet that every reality is a social construct, that truth and reality have no stable and objective content – that in fact they do not exist. Post-modernism implies a destabilization of our rational or theological apprehension of reality, of the anthropological structure given by God to man and woman, of the order of the universe as established by God. This was the secularization process (See Marguerite A. Peeters, *The New Global Ethics: Challenges for the Church*, 13.

with the consequence of downplaying transcendence – a fact which will greatly influence the rise of modern science.

The degeneration, thus started, made its way down philosophical history in a more dramatic way.

Modern Philosophy (16th – 18th Centuries)

Modern in philosophy originally meant “new,” a new historical era distinguished both from antiquity and from the intervening Middle Ages. During this period philosophy took up a new character marked by a number of events in the intellectual, religious, political, and social life of the West: the explorations of the world; the Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on *individual* faith; the rise of commercial urban society; and the dramatic appearance during the Renaissance of new ideas in all areas of culture etc.

The medieval view of the world as a hierarchical order of beings created and governed by God was supplanted by the mechanistic picture of the world as a vast machine, the parts of which move in accordance with strict physical laws, without purpose or will. In this view of the universe, known as Mechanism, science took precedence over spirituality, and the surrounding physical world that we experience and observe received as much, if not more, attention than the world to come. The aim of human life was no longer conceived as preparation for salvation in the next world, but rather as the satisfaction of people's natural desires. Political institutions and ethical principles ceased to be regarded as reflections of divine command and came to be seen as practical devices created by humans.

The human mind itself seemed an inexhaustible reality, on a par with the physical reality of matter. Modern philosophers had the task of defining more clearly the essence of mind and of matter, and of reasoning about the relation between the two. Individuals ought to see for themselves, they believed, and study the “book of Nature,” and in every case search for the truth with their own reason.

Since the 15th century modern philosophy has been marked by a continuing interaction between systems of thought based on a mechanistic, materialistic interpretation of the universe and those founded on a belief in human thought as the only ultimate reality. This interaction has reflected the

*increasing effect of scientific discovery and political change on philosophical speculation.*¹²

In this connection we think of philosophers like Francis Bacon, *who denounced reliance on authority* and verbal argument and criticized Aristotelian logic as useless for the discovery of new laws. He called for a new scientific method based on reasoned generalization from careful observation and experiment. He was the first to formulate rules for this new method of drawing conclusions, now known as inductive inference.

On his part Descartes resolved to reconstruct all human knowledge on an absolutely certain foundation by refusing to accept any belief, even the belief in his own existence, until he could prove it to be necessarily true. Descartes believed that by following his rationalist method, one could establish *first principles* (fundamental underlying truths) for all knowledge—about man, the world, and even God (basing himself on mathematics as the model of all science). Hobbes (only matter is real), Spinoza (all things are aspects or modes of God), and Locke continued this materialism and mechanicism of Bacon and Descartes. For one thing, *“Locke greatly influenced the scepticism of later British thinkers, such as George Berkeley and David Hume, by recognizing the vagueness of the concepts of metaphysics and by pointing out that inferences about the world outside the mind cannot be proved with certainty. His ethical and political writings had an equally great influence on subsequent thought. During the late 18th century the founders of the modern school of utilitarianism, which makes happiness for the largest possible number of people the standard of right and wrong, drew heavily on the writings of Locke. His defence of constitutional government, religious tolerance, and natural human rights influenced the development of liberal thought during the late 18th century in France and the United States as well as in Great Britain.”*¹³

The other extreme was a re-birth of ancient Idealism (Plato) and Scepticism (Pyrrho). Here we think of the works of Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. Kant’s writings constituted a high point of the

¹²C. Andrew, “Western Philosophy,” in Encarta-Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD].

¹³ *Ibid.*

Enlightenment, a fertile intellectual and cultural period that helped stimulate the social changes that produced the French Revolution (1789-1799). Other leading thinkers of this movement included Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Denis Diderot. Voltaire, developing the tradition of Deism begun by Locke and other liberal thinkers, reduced religious beliefs to those that can be justified by rational inference from the study of nature. Rousseau criticized civilization as a corruption of humanity's nature and developed Hobbes's doctrine that the state is based on a social contract with its citizens and represents the popular will. Diderot published a 35-volume work called the *Encyclopédie* to which many scientists and philosophers contributed. Diderot and his Encyclopedists, as they were known, associated the progress and the happiness of humankind with science and knowledge.

19th and 20th Century Philosophy

Immanuel Kant transcended the Enlightenment divisions and concentrated on integrating experience and reason, thus attempting to bridge the gap between rationalism and empiricism.

However, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, who considered themselves as Kant's disciples and his spiritual successors, refined the metaphysical tendencies of Kant's idealism, into consistent forms of absolute idealism. According to this tenet, "Mind" or "Spirit" is the ultimate reality. They were greatly influenced in their approach by the French Revolution. Fichte, for example, did not only defend the French Revolution, but also saw it as a great advancement in the human condition.¹⁴

They also spotted inconsistencies latent in Kant's contentions that the mind cannot attain knowledge about the-thing-in-itself (noumenon). Kant had attempted to posit knowledge of unknowable entities which are beyond experiential knowledge. Such a concept has no foundation in a consistent idealist philosophy of the mind.¹⁵ The mind, according to them, cannot know unknowable entities. It can only know the actually knowable, which is all that is. The universe is

¹⁴ W. M. Martin, "Fichte," in R. L. Arrington (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophers*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Oxford 2001, 246.

¹⁵ M. J. Walsh, *A History of Philosophy*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1985, 337.

in a state of process which is a self-manifestation of Infinite Reason. In man's philosophical reflection on the universe, it becomes aware of itself. Philosophical reflection is the self-reflection and self-knowledge of the absolute. Philosophical reflection therefore, can retrace how the infinite mind evolves in its self-expression. This particular point gave each of these German Philosophers the opportunity to develop his own unified system of the universe and its historical development.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte's reaction to the Political Revolution in France and the Philosophical Revolution in Germany caused him to transform Kant's critical idealism into absolute idealism by eliminating Kant's "things-in-themselves" and making the self, or the ego, the ultimate reality. The sole task of philosophy for him is to clarify consciousness, whose highest degree is achieved by a philosopher since he alone recognizes "Mind" or "Spirit" that which is central to reality.

Schelling became the leading philosopher of the movement known as Romanticism, which, in contrast to the Enlightenment, placed its faith in feeling and the creative imagination rather than in reason. Besides the above influences, Greek mythology also played a central role in Schelling's philosophical endeavours. Schelling had a distaste for the conservative, traditional theology that he was compelled to learn.

Hegel is by far the greatest idealist of the 19th century with excess faith in reason and progress. His encyclopaedic knowledge in many disciplines provided him with enough resources for the approach he took in philosophy. For Hegel, Philosophy's task is to chart the development of Absolute Spirit from abstract, undifferentiated being into more and more concrete reality. Hegel believed this development occurs by a dialectical process—that is, a process through which conflicting ideas become resolved—which consists of a series of stages that occur in *triads*. Each triad involves (1) an initial state (or thesis), which might be an idea or a movement; (2) its opposite state (or antithesis); and (3) a higher state, (or synthesis), that combines elements from the two opposites into a new and superior arrangement. The synthesis then becomes the thesis of the

next triad in an unending progress toward the ideal. This will greatly influence the dialectic materialism of Karl Marx.

Nietzsche stressed the supremacy of an existence that is purely egoistic. He also scorned the Christian and democratic ideas of the equal worth of human beings, maintaining that it is up to a few aristocrats to refuse to subordinate themselves to a state or cause, and thereby achieve self-realization and greatness. He eventually preached the *death of God*, a view that was to influence in an untold way the developing wind of secularism, which not even the rigorous arguments in defence of faith and religion by Søren Kierkegaard could prevent.

Bentham originated the ethical principle of utilitarianism—that what is useful is good—and Mill developed and refined this doctrine. Pleasure is the *sumum bonum* and all actions (their rightness and wrongness) should be measured in terms of the amount of pleasure and the number of persons involved. It was with Bentham's Utilitarianism, alongside the 'Thomas Malthus' theory of Population that the final separation of spiritual values, religious truths, and moral absolutes from the public forum took place, in the 19th century.¹⁶ A distinct philosophy, called Secularism, was developed in the mid-19th century by George Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh who postulated principles of natural morality independent of revelation and supernatural orientation; absolute freedom on all matters, including morality; natural improvement in this life; absolute separation of the Church and the state.¹⁷

Summarily, according to Karl Marx, Human culture is dependent on economic (material) conditions and serves economic ends. Marx, for the greater part, was influenced by Hegelian idealism, which he tried to combine with enlightenment materialism. This led Marx to the idea that “philosophy must both comprehend itself historically and engage itself practically in the progressive struggle of humanity.”¹⁸ In this way, He turned Hegel's idealism around and

¹⁶ C. Andrew, “Western Philosophy,” in Encarta-Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD].

¹⁷ T. F. McMahon, “Secularism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13, p. 37.

¹⁸ A. W. Wood, “Marx” in R. L. Arrington (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophers*, 393.

substituted Matter for Spirit, thus defining the essence of man as praxis. Marx inherited Feuerbach's immanentist anthropology and transforms his generic man into a producer man. Man, for Marx, is what he produces. However, man suffers a basic alienation, because what he produces does not belong to him, though he receives a wage that is not commensurate to his labour. He therefore suffers an expropriation imposed by the oppressing class, and which is supported by the phenomenon of religion. Religion, he concluded, is "the opiate of the masses" that serves the political end of suppressing mass revolution.

It was the turn of Pragmatism to make its own contribution to the building edifice of secularism. Charles Sanders Peirce, a leading American Pragmatist, advocated for what is termed "laboratory philosophy," hoping to introduce scientific logic into metaphysics. He advanced *a theory of truth that defined truth as that which an ideal community of researchers could agree upon*. Peirce concluded that many traditional philosophical concepts have no practical use and thus are meaningless. On the other hand, John Dewey emphasized the cooperative process in which human beings, as intelligent and social beings, **create** and **revise** ideas about the world. One such process was scientific inquiry; another was participation in just and democratic social and political communities. Dewey concluded that science and democracy are the only sure guides for intelligent behaviour.

Atheistic existentialism of the 20th century with persons like Jean-Paul Sartre had a culminating effect in the contemporary outright characterization of society as Secularist. Man is equated with *Freedom* and is to decide who he is and who he wants to become. And of necessity, God is totally out of the scene.¹⁹ Two central existentialist doctrines flowing from this include: there is no fixed human essence structuring our lives and our choices are never determined by anything except our own free will.

The Politico-Socio-Economic Worldview (Cultures)

¹⁹J.-P. Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism," in S. Lupper, *Existing: An Introduction to Existential Thought*, California, Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000, p. 268.

While the Gatherer (primitive man) will surely look at the Agrarian with awe and surprise at his 'sophisticated' life-style, the Agrarian, were he to rise from the dead, will definitely accuse the industrialist for destroying man and the world, while the industrialist will be full of pity at these 'ancients' whose eras were not privileged to witness the marvels of human creativity, and still more the technological age. However the debate may proceed, let us find out.

Passage from Agrarian Age to Industrial Age (Industrial Revolution)

Will Durant makes a moving observation in this regard:

Apparently moral codes change; what is it that changes them? Why is it that actions considered good at one time, or in one place, can come to be considered bad in another? Probably it is an alteration in the economic basis of life that determines the moral change. There have been two profound transformations of this sort in history; one was the passage from hunting to agriculture, the other was the passage from agriculture to industry. These are the two pivotal events in human history of development, on which all other fundamental incidents and processes turned.²⁰

The agricultural milieu is today described as a rural milieu as opposed to urban milieu. Such an epoch (over 1500 years) was chiefly marked by values such as chastity, early marriage, *divorceless* monogamy, prohibition of pre-marital experimentations, easy embrace of Christianity's values seen as compatible with theirs, God-centred cultural values (things are done because they are pleasing to God).²¹

The tides overturned with the dawn of the industrial age (born from the Renaissance period, 14th to 16th century), and consolidated by the 18th century with the birth of machines in Britain. When factories appeared, men and women and children began to leave home and family, authority and unity, to work as individuals,

²⁰W. Durant, *The Mansions of Philosophy: A Survey of Human Life and Destiny*, New York, Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1941, p. 114.

²¹Cf. *Ibid.*, 116, p. 117.

individually paid, in dismal structures raised to shelter not human being but machines. Cities grew, machines proliferated, life became more complex and difficult to understand; choices in action increased, new moral issues were created, mental maturity was delayed, marriage became a burden and motherhood a form of slavery likewise pregnancy and children, which were seen as hindrances in the competing industrial world; the work normally done by the woman was now done by factories and needed to be paid for; birth control achieved rapid respectability, and contraceptives became one of the problems of philosophy; sex was dissociated from reproduction etc.²² This will prepare the grounds for the great *Sexual Revolution* of the 1960s which defined sex in solely pleasure terms, ousting every idea of God and His will in that regard. This break had far-reaching consequences. Today's full-grown secularism is simply an amplification of this. The underlying philosophy in these circumstances is the "disregard for authority, natural law, tradition and any God-figure," such that man is in total control of all he thinks and does just as he controls the great machinery of the factories – a *Super-Humanism*.

It is noted that the Industrial Revolution has had a hand in almost every *modern* flux.²³ As would be expected, these changes did not grow overnight, but were a product of foregoing epoch-marking ideological and institutional upheavals.

Cultural and political factors also partially caused the Industrial Revolution. Values defined by an intellectual movement in 18th-century Europe known as the Enlightenment, particularly the growing belief in science and esteem for hard work and material success, guided and motivated early inventors and manufacturers. Recent historical work has shown that not only intellectuals but also many ordinary people had changed their view of the world by the 1750s due to the influence of Enlightenment philosophy. The belief that nature and society could be rationally understood and

²²W. Durant, *The Mansions of Philosophy: A Survey of Human Life and Destiny*, p. 118.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

manipulated created a dramatic new context for dealing with production and technology.²⁴

Closely associated with the Industrial Age is the birth of Technology which has reached sophisticated proportions in the current century and still bustles with incredible potentials. For one thing, “science can serve humanity but it can also become an instrument of great evil. Indeed, it is science that has the potential to make evil truly terrible. It is only when scientific work is sustained by ethical responsibility that it is able to be what it is meant to be.”²⁵ Unfortunately, experience has shown that modern secular culture has taken the negative extreme. For once man was ‘deified’ by that extreme humanism of the enlightenment, all authority other than man’s and science was ousted from the scene (no God-given standards of judgment), and Protagoras’ maxim won the day – “man is the measure of all things.” In the words of Lauer, “18th century’s confidence in scientific method had an extremely critical attitude towards matters of faith that could not, by their very nature, be subjected to a ‘scientific’ critique.”²⁶

Industrialization had sweeping consequences. It not only radically changed work and life, but it also changed family life and personal leisure. In some ways, it redefined the purposes for having children. Also, such a world view cooperated with Darwinian attack upon religious belief. For when young men and women, bold with money, discovered that religion was denouncing their pleasures, they found a thousand reasons in science for denouncing religion.²⁷ What better prelude and concomitant catalyst could be sought for the French Revolution? First let us look at the Enlightenment more closely.

Enlightenment

²⁴ P. Stearns, “Global Consequences of the Industrial Revolution,” in Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation.

²⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, New York, Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005, p. 45.

²⁶ R. Lauer, “Philosophy of Enlightenment,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, p. 441.

²⁷ W. Durant, *The Mansions of Philosophy: A Survey of Human Life and Destiny*, p. 128.

Though anticipated in the above discussion, a more detailed look at the Enlightenment is of great importance here. Above all else, the Enlightenment played an indispensable (proximate) role to the outburst of radical secularism, which has marked history since then and especially in today's 21st century.

The Enlightenment is a cultural epoch roughly located by many historians about the 18th century (though not with strict boundaries). It is a culture sustained by formal philosophical thoughts than any other and which has likewise created and sustained a number of cultural trends, secularism being its favourite grand-child, born of its precious daughter, the French Revolution.²⁸ The philosophers met here include: Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet, Beccaria, Holbach (who scorned metaphysics) etc. Their 17th century predecessors include the likes of Bacon, Descartes, and Locke. Its political precursors include Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; while in the field of knowledge we think of Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. There was also the major influence of the prestige of natural sciences championed by Newton's *Principia* (1687).²⁹ The most fundamental tenets of the Enlightenment could be briefly summarized in three hallmarks:

Reason:

- No to all innate ideas among which were classed the “so-called revealed Christian truths.” The tremendous influence of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) is undoubtedly at work.

- The greatest evil of the Church (Roman Catholic) was described as its transcendental and supernatural base, which put faith and revelation above reason. All such things were discarded and Reason enthroned.

- Voltaire will even say, referring to the Church and her beliefs, *Ecrasez L'Infame – Crush the Infamous Thing*.

- The French *Encyclopedie* went as far as saying, “Reason is to Philosophy what grace is to the Christian” – thus opposing reason and religion while dismissing the later.

²⁸ E. Hegel, “Enlightenment,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, p. 435.

²⁹ C. Brinton, “Enlightenment,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 519.

- Kant provided the Enlightenment with its banner – “Dare to think for yourself.”³⁰

Nature:

- Reason, ‘properly working,’ on their terms, enabled man to discover and rediscover nature beneath the concealing corruption of religion, social structure, and convention.

- Enlightenment ethics was hedonistic and instrumentalist, having as models, Jeremy Bentham and Helvétius.³¹

Progress:

- Here we meet with the doctrine of ‘Natural Salvation’ – the attainment of immortality by everyone in this flesh on this earth, ‘an indefinite progress born of thinkers like Turgot (see his ‘Sorbonne Speech,’ *On the Successive Advances of the Human Mind*), and Condorcet. This was construed in opposition to the Judeo-Christian belief in the “better life/world to come” – Augustine’s (the Medieval) *Civitate Dei* – *City of God*. For the enlightened, salvation is a matter of Reason evolving so as to take over control of all of the physical and cultural environment, the transcendent and supernatural (metaphysical) has no place.³² An offshoot of this was obviously the Darwinian (19th century) “Theory of Evolution” with its anti-religious characterization.

It is understandable why the enlightened treat the achievements of the past, notably the Middle Ages, with scepticism and all positive or moral authority and the respect for tradition is rejected.³³ Shall man survive such a climate of opinions or need we re-visit those traditional (philosophical and cultural) values?

Born alongside the aftermaths of the enlightenment were the secret societies of the Freemason, Rosicrucian and Illuminati which

³⁰ C. Brinton, “Enlightenment,” p. 520.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 520, p. 521.

³³ E. Hegel, “Enlightenment,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 435.

encouraged a bond among *free-thinkers*, therefore ensuring the anti-religion movements of the ‘enlightened.’³⁴

Perhaps it will not be an over-emphasis to note that,

*The concept of a revealed religion and the acceptance of truth on the authority of someone else are repugnant to an Enlightenment based on reason and experience. This explains its attitude to Christianity. Christ is to be considered as one among many founders of religion. His teaching must be judged by the norms of rational-natural religion (utilitarian morality) and its ethical-humanitarian demands. Consequently, the Bible is a kind of code of ethics, to be studied independently of any alleged divine inspiration and pastoral interpretation. It must be cleansed of anything offensive, notably miracles.*³⁵

The path was thus more than charted for the perfection of secularization.

Reformation

Very briefly, the Reformation played a very strategic role in the secularization of Europe, and the other continents, through her influence. Western civilization was predominantly Christian at its very roots. Discarding of Christianity would become possible with the break of unity in the Christian world by the 16th century. Luther advocated an *invisible church*, thereby separating religion from its cultural accretions (wittingly or unwittingly); while Calvin called for an *autonomous visible church*, thereby cleansing the church of its theocratic authority (wittingly or unwittingly). Weakened therefore secularizing tendencies could easily crack through as became very evident in the French Revolution.³⁶

French Revolution (1789 – 1799)

Here we meet a violent overthrow of political and social structures of the French Kingdom and a spiritual and religious drama - demolishing traditional ecclesiastical structures of one of the oldest

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

³⁶ T. F. McMahon, “Secularism,” p. 36.

Catholic countries of Europe the revolutionaries aimed to formulate valid principles of organization for all modern societies, while prescinding the church's traditional doctrines or opposing them. The Philosophers rejected divine revelation and the authority of the ecclesiastical *magisterium* and replaced them, in the name of reason, with 'natural religion' or more rarely, with outright atheism.³⁷

There was overt hostility towards religious congregations on account of their numerousness and the vows of chastity and obedience which their members took, on grounds that it is contrary to human nature.

This Revolution was further marked by harsh constitutions against the Catholic Church, anti-clericalism, killing of Church men, persecution, rejection of anything religious from public forums, closing of churches and seizure of church properties etc.³⁸

In the words of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger,

*The French Revolution raised the banner of an (...) upheaval. The sacrum imperium had been in the decline since the late Middle Ages, and the interpretation of history that it represented had become increasingly brittle ... It meant the rejection of a divine foundation for history and the existence of the state. History is no longer subject to the criterion of an antecedent idea of God that gives its form, and the state is now considered in purely secular terms as an entity based on rationality and on the will of its citizens. For the very first time in history (French Revolution – 18th century), we see a purely secular state that discards, as a mythical world view, the idea that God is the ultimate guarantor of political life and that it is he who lays down the norms of its conduct ... God and his will lose their relevance to public life.*³⁹

Secularism and its Value System: A Recapitulation

Just to ease remembrance, the following points stand out from our discussion as preludes to the great fall of humanity into the cold arms of secularism:

³⁷A. Latreille, "French Revolution," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, p. 186.

³⁸ *Ibid.* pp.186, 189.

³⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, p. 137.

- Arrogant Humanism; - Scientism; - Rationalism; - Natural Morality; - Excess stress on Individual Freedom; - Liberalism; - Away with authority; - Denial of ultimate values; - Denial of metaphysics and ontological truths; - Denial of universal human nature; - Denial of the transcendent; - Mechanicism and materialism; and ultimately - The Rejection of God.

All the above said and done, Secularism may be characteristically defined as a new closed world view which functions very much as a new religion.⁴⁰ Quoting Bryan Wilson, Secularization is the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance.⁴¹ Descriptively, secularism holds out a narrow conception of knowledge and apart from its rejection of essences, it logically excludes any knowledge of God and the spiritual world. Human morality cannot be adequately explained. Although certain values (e.g. social progress) are desirable, they cannot be shown to be either ultimate or even obligatory.⁴²

We may define as the secularists' dictum: "he who is loyal to earth is a sworn enemy to the transcendent," for it is impossible, on secularist terms, to accept both the transcendent and the temporal.⁴³

With all the above discussed factors leading up to the decisive turn to secularism, a fact of today's 21st century, it may then be appropriate to examine more closely the "value system" of secularism (characteristics of a secularized society), in addition to the already discussed points, in view of considering the fundamental question: Do these values adequately answer questions pertaining to man's existence and destiny? Would a return to traditional values prove expedient?

Characteristics of a Secularized Society

Anti-Religion - Profanity

⁴⁰ H. Cox, *The Secular City*, SCM Press Ltd., London 1966, p. 21.

⁴¹ V. Pratt, *Religion and Secularization*, London, Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1970, p.

3.

⁴² A. Latreille, "French Revolution," p. 38.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

Summarily, Religion in a secular society is viewed as an impediment to human self-fulfilment.⁴⁴ Men and women have moral autonomy, no need for reference to any transcendent authority.⁴⁵ The West, accustomed to secularized society is shocked at the sight of society governed by religious conventions.⁴⁶ Once God is ousted from the picture, then any and everything goes.

The resulting atmosphere could be aptly described as profanity - man's terrestrial horizon is stressed as the only thing that matters to the disappearance of any *supramundane* reality.⁴⁷

Collapse of Morality – Constructing a Morality without God

With the loss of the fundamental Christian consensus the basic moral insights revealed by Christianity, sustained only as long as the entire culture bore the imprint of Christianity, crumbled as well. What was left is *naked* reason that refused to learn from any historical reality but was willing to listen only to its own self. Reason, by cutting off its roots in the faith of a historical and religious culture and wishing now to be nothing more than empirical reason, became blind.⁴⁸ The optimism of Bayle is thus shattered. He held that there is one moral truth that comes from God and every individual law and norm must take this truth as its point of reference.⁴⁹ Perhaps the ancients were better advanced than us in this regard – for them the whole of reality was explained in religious categories with the deities at the centre, even if they failed to have a concise and harmonious understanding of the nature of these gods. Greek Mythology and our African cultures testify to this.⁵⁰

The following quote highlights the secular morality of the French Existentialist, J. P. Sartre:

God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are to have morality, a society and a law abiding world, it is essential

⁴⁴ E. Norman, *Secularization*, New York, Continuum, 2002, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁷ V. Pratt, *Religion and Secularization*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, p. 65.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ J. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, p. 29.

*that certain values should be taken seriously; they must have an a priori existence ascribed to them. It must be considered obligatory a priori to be honest, not to lie, not to beat one's wife, to bring up children and so forth; so we are going to do a little work on this subject, which will enable us to show that these values exist all the same, inscribed in an intelligible heaven although, of course, there is no God...*⁵¹

Truth and Absolute Standards Discarded

Relativism is an essential characteristic of a secular society, wherein all absolute standards and reference points have been discarded. The dialectic philosophy (dialectic materialism after the model of Karl Marx) of such a society dissolves all conceptions of final absolute truth and of a final absolute state of humanity corresponding to it.⁵² Historicism denies the existence of absolute standards of goodness, truth and beauty and proclaims the total historical relativity of these values.⁵³ Historicism appears in contemporary secular society in the form of Existentialism.⁵⁴

No Fixed Human Nature

It follows from the denial of absolute truths that man has no essence. In fact the modern expressions of these are to be found in Existentialism. For Ortega Gasset, "man has no nature, but he has a history. Man is the sum of his acts"⁵⁵ – in this sense he determines his essence by his acts. Thus seen there can be no standards against which to evaluate man's activities.

Irreligious Pragmatism

Urban-secular man is pragmatic – he concerns himself with practical or material affairs, with the actual working out of an idea in experience. He has little interest in what has been termed 'borderline questions' or metaphysical considerations. Because religion has

⁵¹J-P. Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism," p. 268.

⁵²A. Stern, *Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values*, Mouton and Co, The Netherlands 1962, p. 168.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁴Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵⁵A. Stern, *Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values*, p. 176.

concerned itself so largely precisely with these things, he does not ask ‘religious questions.’⁵⁶

Modern secular man is a ‘technopolitan,’ who is essentially a pragmatist. He sees the world not so much as an awesome enigma, evoking a sense of hushed reverence, he does not ask religious questions because he fully believes he can handle the world without them.⁵⁷

Quoting Cornelis A. van Peursen:

*In the secularized world there is no longer an ontological way of thinking, a thinking about higher ... metaphysical beings Now we are liberated from all these ‘unreal’ supernatural entities ... only that which is directly related to us is real. Things do not exist in themselves; there are no longer substances, but they exist in and for the sake of what they do with us and what we do with them.*⁵⁸

In the period of myth (Pre-Philosophical age), the main issue was that something is; in the period of ontological thinking (Scholastic Middle Ages) it was what something is; in today’s secular period of functional thinking, it is how something is, how it functions.⁵⁹

Political Upheaval

In the political realm, the dominating Political climate in the secular society is what Joseph Ratzinger describes as ***Relativistic Democracy***, which has come to be hailed precisely over “Medieval Theocracy” once God and all the transcendent value system alongside the God-idea have been ousted from human society. Herein, the only law is majority conviction (as proposed by Richard Rorty). Christianity/Religion has no friendly ties with such Democracy, for Religion holds out the heteronomy of the person (man is not sole judge of his choices) while such democracy retains the strict autonomy of the person-making as its core *freedom* and not the *good* and proposes a preference in speech of *values* (whatever they

⁵⁶Cf. H. COX, *The Secular City*, p. 62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁹Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

may be) as opposed to *truth* (objective and unchangeable). Clearly, man's autonomy has made him a demy-god, dictating and arbitrating all his choices and so-called values with utter impunity.⁶⁰

In such a system, Natural Law is rejected because it reeks of metaphysics so as to maintain relativism; no other principle governs political activity but the *decision of the majority, which occupies the position of the truth* in the life of the state.

In the Christian Bible we read: *Quid sit Veritas? – What is the Truth?* Pilate asked Jesus (Jn 18:38). Kelsen sees in this question the scepticism which a politician must possess. In this sense, the question already has its answer – 'truth is unattainable.' Pilate turns then to the crowd and asks them to decide the disputed question of truth, in short, to decide what is truth by means of a majority vote.⁶¹ And behold the 'truth' of the relativistic democratic vote saw the condemnation of an innocent man.

Still in the political realm, secular society exonerates the new found doctrine of *Liberalism*. The American Philosopher, Richard Rorty, for instance, has formulated this new utopia of banality, that is, his ideal of liberal society in which absolute values and criteria will no longer exist; a *sense of well-being* will be the only goal worth striving for – a *contentless* 'well-being' at that.⁶²

Economic, Scientific, and Technological Upheavals

Arnold Toynbee points to the 17th century as the beginning of secularization.⁶³ Science and Industry, working together, provide the tools, machines and resources for carrying on the activities of a technological society, but they also provide consumer products on a mass scale which must be marketed; and this requires a mass market, which in turn gives rise to what has been tentatively called a ***mass culture***. Wherever a *mass culture* arises ... the note of selectivity and sensibility in judgment tends to go out of culture.⁶⁴ The earliest impact of the sciences upon Western cultures took the form of

⁶⁰J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, p. 60, 62.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶³B. Meland, *The Secularization of Modern Cultures*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 16.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 28.

secularizing thought ... Its scientific world-view left no room for belief in providence or for the intervention of a transcendent God in the event of history.⁶⁵ Throwing overboard (by scientific technological age) of ultimate meanings and ultimate conception of orderliness in the universe which have had cultural consequences⁶⁶ such as the secularization of processes of the scientific discipline itself and its activities and likewise processes of thought on which social issues and other public opinions are based and analysed and then the final secularization of the image of man (denying his transcendence) through statistical methods, mass production and mass marketing.⁶⁷

Secularism has become a way of life and not just some reaction against religion.

Anonymity of Modern Life

In the midst of urban machinery cut away from human feeling and touch, one finds oneself in a seemingly large crowd but still experiences the chronic feeling of loneliness. The *anonymity* of modern life has to do essentially with the impersonal relationships that mark it off. Services, jobs (banks etc.), though bringing many people together, remain largely functional. This is further accentuated by the characteristic mobility of modern life in search for jobs or improvement. Discrimination, competition and strife are only too obvious off-shoots.⁶⁸ The list is inexhaustible!

Human Existence and Destiny vis-à-vis Secularism: Thinking Traditional Values

As was already intimated, when all is said and done, man stands at the heart of all these changes, shifts and fluctuations of cultural trends – both as their originator and sustainer, and either as the beneficiary or victim, as the case may be. The position from which he stands in relation to these movements depends so much, if not

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 72, p. 73.

⁶⁸ V. Pratt, *Religion and Secularization*, pp. 1, 2.

entirely, on the authentic interpretation of his Existence and Destiny. Is there an ideal or absolute standard against which authentic human existence needs to be measured and which guarantees a particular destiny for man, or is human existence an open ended question, preceding every essential definition of and about man but for the fact that, he exists first and then decides what to make of his existence as the Existentialists (especially atheistic) hold, while bearing in mind that he has no destiny beyond his material circumscriptions here and now? Beyond this life is annihilation- as Jean-Paul Sartre and Heidegger postulated.

The secularists' denial of God meant an automatic rejection of the human person as a creature of God and therefore a distortion of traditional conceptions of man, his ought and ought not do (therefore his ethics), his knowledge and value system and ultimately robs him of his transcendental nature and his openness to his special calling to transcendence. Such was the baggage thrown away alongside the 'absolute values.' Contrary to this, it is worth noting that, the human soul, because it is rational has the capacity to transcend. This is a truth that resounds through the creative epochs of Aristotle and later the Scholastics. Human nature is ontologically rooted and man is best understood as a psychosomatic union of body and soul, a rational soul, a soul capable of transcendence. Secularist confining of man to the material only does injury to the authentic *human existence*.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that man does not merely exist by chance and cannot afford the luxury of an arbitrary unending range of moral options unconcerned with any ultimate realities or truths, succumbing to secularism. Toynbee calls for the re-introduction of the religious element, that is, the religious patrimony of all cultures, especially Western Christianity, which had once been ousted by secularism.⁶⁹

The uncontrollable freedom of the sciences has led to medical progress which inevitably has come to pose serious threats to the dignity of the human person. The *cans* have been confused with the *oughts* such that there is no demarcation between the two – what I

⁶⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, p. 141.

can, I do. Results of this are evident in cloning, trafficking in human organs, storage of human foetuses for transplant, research with human embryos etc., under the umbrella of the so-called ‘medical advancement, with the uncharitable expenditure of huge sums of money while many languish in abject poverty.’⁷⁰ What reasons will science give if not mere unbridled curiosity, and an unpardonable confusion of the *ought* and the *can* with exclusive stress on the latter, when the so-called ‘world powers’ spend billions of dollars to launch spaceships while millions of persons perish in the same countries because of lack of food, clothes or even shelter – the basics of life. In such a culture where God and his laws have been bade farewell, the corresponding dignity of the human person is downplayed and man becomes a means/tool to another’s ends. The ancient and medieval interpretations of human existence, (explained above), witness against our secular age. We have advanced in technology but we need to re-visit those traditional values, lest man will perish at the hands of his own work.

A remedy to this, the legal enactment of the value and dignity of man, of freedom, equality and solidarity, together with the fundamental principles of authentic democracy and of the rule of law in society, entails an *image of man, a moral option, and a concept of law that are not all self-explanatory*⁷¹ as the secularists will have it. The specific content-filled Essence and Nature of man must be reasserted as was the case in traditional cultural values (with specific reference to the classical/scholastic culture).

Practices against the natural conceptions of marriage and family such as the aberrations: homosexuality, divorce, extra-marital sexual activities etc. can only be arrested by a true picture of the human person, re-introducing the absolute and metaphysical standards, values and criteria once swept away by the secularists in the baggage of “Religion”. Is the observation of Joseph Ratzinger, “Reverence of that which is holy to other persons and the reverence of the Holy

⁷⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, p. 147.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

One, God is fundamental *in all cultures*,⁷² and where this is shattered (like with secularized cultures), something essential perishes in the society.⁷³

To push it further, the liberalism typical of the secular culture breeds an air of ‘permissivism.’ In a world like the West, where money and wealth are the measure of all things, and where the model of the free market imposes its implacable laws on every aspect of life, authentic Catholic ethics now appears to many like an alien body from times long past, as a kind of meteorite which is in opposition, not only to the concrete habits of life, but also to the way of thinking underlying them. Economic liberalism creates its exact counterpart, ‘permissivism’ on the moral plane.⁷⁴ Ruptures consequent on this include: Separation of sexuality from motherhood, sexuality from procreation. Sex is all pleasure (reminiscent of Epicureanism, Benthamism) and has remained without a locus or reference.⁷⁵ Hence all forms of sexual gratification are transformed into the “rights” of the individual (e.g. even homosexuals). Our Cultures, Ratzinger bemoans, are the first in which such ruptures have come to pass.⁷⁶

Man this far, made omnipotent and the measure of all things, lives so obliviously of the fact that he actually does have an *Origin* (in God), a *Nature* (according to which to act), and a *Destiny* (union with his Origin, God). Should this threefold absolute and undeniable truth about man be restored to the centre of every philosophizing about man (against secularists’ contentions), then we will put under check the pretensions of today’s prevalent ethical distortions such as *Consequentialism* (nothing is good or bad in itself. An act depends entirely upon its end); *Proportionalism* (moral conduct depends upon the evaluation and weighing of the proportions of goods that are involved; no objective standards for good or bad exist); *Exaggerated Personalism* (man is the sole arbitrator in every moral judgment – sort

⁷²‘Culture’ here is understood as the traditional cultures, untainted by marks of secularism and its concomitant ideologies and philosophies. The culture of simple, natural man.

⁷³ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, pp. 149, 150.

⁷⁴ J. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, Italy, Fowler Wright Books Ltd., 1985, p. 83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷⁶ J. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 85.

of subjectivism, relativism and ego-centrism).⁷⁷ This entails the recognition that “all human persons are spiritual beings ordered to an end which will be the full revelation of themselves and of their creator to them. In developing, the human race should not just concentrate on what is material (as does the secularist) but also on this end (destiny) which should be manifested in the human race as eternity.”⁷⁸ This means man will be able to elude the grasp of secularist atheistic *super-humanism* whereby man continues to desire only one thing – to be his own creator and his own master (Gen 3:5) - ‘you will be like God,’ - freedom from the law of the creator, freedom from the laws of nature itself, becoming absolute Lord of one’s own destiny.⁷⁹ Contrarily, *Perfect Humanism* is realized only in the acknowledgement of supreme values.

When Jean-Paul Sartre makes man *absolutely free* and even equates man and freedom⁸⁰ the basic question arises: “how can the free world do justice to its moral responsibility?” We note here that freedom preserves its dignity only as long as it retains the relationship to its ethical foundations and to its ethical task. An individual freedom without substance dissolves into meaninglessness since the individual’s freedom can exist only in an order of freedoms,⁸¹ in which order, Divine Free Will is supreme. It is only through this that it will be brought to silence, the secularist notions hatched by the Enlightenment whereby God is only the creator of the world (if at all) and then leaving it to itself of necessity, has nothing more to do with it; and also the extreme theories which hold that the present world is solely the product of evolution – and so man alone must make a reasonable world ... in socio-economic terms.⁸²

It boils down then to saying that the human person should be re-defined in terms of who he truly is. Man is created by God. The human person has to be true to the goals of his creation and has to respect the designs of the Creator. This approach views reality in

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 90.

⁷⁸ E. Timchia, *Bioethics: Lecture Notes for Theology Three Students*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ J. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 91.

⁸⁰ J-P. Sartre, “Existentialism and Humanism,” p. 268.

⁸¹ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, p. 49.

⁸² J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Today and Tomorrow*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2005², pp. 39, 40, 41.

terms of the eternal, the immutable and the unchangeable.⁸³ This approach is based on the Natural Law which according to its teaching refers to the eternal plan of God discovered by human reason and which is true at all times and for all peoples, places and circumstances. This speaks of the restoration of absolutes while dethroning man and human reason from the idolatrous claims of supremacy accorded them by secularism.

In fact, in a moving excerpt from Max Scheler we find a profound insight to man's position in the whole of creation which ties very much with the traditional scholastic outlook:

As soon as man has separated himself from the rest of nature and looks upon nature as an 'object' – this belongs to his essence and constitutes his very act of becoming human – he must then turn around with a sense of awe and ask: 'where do I stand? What is my place in the universe? (...) Why is there a world as such, and Why and How do I exist? (...) We should note the essential relationship which holds between the consciousness of the world, self-consciousness and the (formal) consciousness of God. The sphere of an Absolute Being (God) as such, regardless of whether it is accessible to experience or knowledge, belongs to the essence of man just as much as self-consciousness and consciousness of the world ... If the expression, 'the origin of religion,' or 'the origin of metaphysics' is not identified with any specific theoretical assumptions or doctrines of faith, but refers only to the origin of this sphere itself, then the origin of religion would coincide with the origin of man himself.'⁸⁴

Thus considered, we may sight with Hans Jonas, the integrity of whose thinking is reflected by his going back to the *past* to reclaim what has been proposed concerning the fact of teleology⁸⁵ (we here think especially of Aristotle and Aquinas). A teleological view of nature automatically corrects the secularist 'self-referential' ethics. As such, the pretensions of a false understanding of science are taken

⁸³ B. Longergan, *Collection*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1967, pp. 252-267.

⁸⁴ M. Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1961, 89-90.

⁸⁵ P. Takov, *Deriving "Ought" from "Is" According to Hans Jonas: Doctoral Dissertation*, Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Romae, 2009, p. 161. (Unpublished Work).

care of. That is, “it is not true that science is necessarily incompatible with a teleological notion of nature. Rather, it is only *modern* science that has come to replicate Gnostic dualism and insist on a world bereft of divinity...”⁸⁶ This speaks of a return to the nature of things contrary to the secularist superficiality and anonymous disregard for ontological and metaphysical truths.

Conclusion

Secularism was once upon a time an affair of only the West, so many think. But the *status quo* has greatly changed today. It has knocked into our continent, Africa, and it is ravaging it to the core. Our worthwhile traditional African Cultural Values: Respect for life, religiosity, community, reverence for family and marriage, reverence for the sacredness of sexuality, sincerity in politics and social life, belief in the life after death (the hereafter) etc.⁸⁷ are all being eroded if not already eroded by the new ideologies and philosophies stamped by secularism as has already come to pass in the West. In fact, “...Africa is keen to follow the idea of the world of technology and to have the prosperity this brings, with the result that ancient religious traditions have entered a period of crisis there too, and public life is dominated more and more by groups who think in purely *secular terms*.”⁸⁸

We need to ‘know’ in the objective sense of the word, insists Hans Jonas.⁸⁹ Secularists definitely ‘know,’ but what does Jonas mean here by ‘knowing’? *We need a philosophical wisdom* that will help us to make correct choices for our action. Only an authentic and sane philosophy can do this. A philosophy that recognizes the value and dignity of man who is open to the beyond and marked with an unrepeatable existence that leads him to an eternity beyond materialism; a philosophy that makes allowance for the immanent

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁷ These are beautifully explained in the Book of J. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1991 (second edition).

⁸⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Values in Time of Upheaval*, p.138.

⁸⁹P. Takov, *Deriving “Ought” from “Is” According to Hans Jonas: Doctoral Dissertation*, p. 157.

and transcendent without opposing the one to the other; a philosophy that takes seriously the essential grounds of metaphysics and ethics; a philosophy that realizes reason and man are not the measure of all things but look out to the absolute truths discoverable self-evidently by human reason, for they are inscribed in the Natural Law; a philosophy that recognizes the place of authority other than the individual; a philosophy that realizes the very limitations of philosophy and is able to cede the guidance of man to religion which concerns itself ultimately with the destiny of man. It is in this that we may aptly talk of “Re-thinking” traditional values. This in no way means a ‘canonization’ of traditional values as the best, for all about them cannot pass as wonderful. However, we may reiterate as already noted, that the ancient traditional values worth of preservation found an indestructible crystallization and authentic reformulation in the Medieval Era, especially with the Scholastics. In that age we could say philosophizing reached its zenith – the past converged to it and the future, not denying advancements, will definitely make honest sense and stay consistent with human existence and destiny, only if it does not forget that veritable heritage.

Jonas’ timeless affirmation of the positive role of philosophy is: “Living now constantly in the shadow of unwanted, built-in automatic utopianism, we are constantly confronted with issues whose positive choice requires supreme wisdom – an impossible situation for man in general, because he does not possess that wisdom, and in particular contemporary man, because he denies the very existence of its object, namely, objective value and truth. We need wisdom most when we believe it least.”⁹⁰

It is only thus that the influence of secularism will be brought under check.

One may wonder whether the world has gained nothing from secularism. Well, it is worth noting that there could hardly be anything to gain from secularism, properly understood. True enough, the world has gained incredibly much and still continues to gain quite much from the advances in science and its application, technology, which are distinguishing marks of today’s secularized society.

⁹⁰H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 21.

However, it is worth noting that these things in themselves (science and technology) do not comprise what secularism is all about. It is like comparing science and scientism. The former is genuine and in no way opposed to man: his origin, nature and destiny; whereas the latter, an attitude that seems to enthrone science as the one and only good (the *summum bonum*), has everything wrong with it, for it denies man of his true origin, nature and destiny as highlighted above. Such is very true of secularism which builds on scientism, so focusing on the progress and complexities of this world as to deny the very author of these things, God, and the purpose for their creation, to aid man on his journey to his eternal destiny. What could one possibly gain from an ideological baggage and existential praxis like secularism which robs the world of meaning and direction? How could one gain something from secularism which by and large distances one from one's very self, which denies that which is very intimate to one, transcendence? On these rest our case against secularism.

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The Theocentric and Anthropocentric Foundations of African Ethics

Mbih J. Tosam

Abstract

This paper critically examines the debate over the source of African ethics. The question of the origin of ethics has preoccupied philosophers for several millennia. In Plato's Euthyphro (10e-11e), for example, Socrates asks: "Is conduct right because the gods command it, or do the gods command it because it is right?" In the debate on the foundation of African ethics, while John Mbiti and most of his followers maintain that religion is at the basis of African ethics as it is at the basis of everything African, others argue for a humanistic and social foundation maintaining that the human person in his/her interpersonal relations with kith and kin in the community is the source of ethics. According to proponents of this view like Wiredu, Bewaji and Gyekye, ethics is a domain in which the principal concern is the relationship between human beings within a social setting. Ethical problems are concerned with human behaviours that affect other human beings. After critically analysing these contending views, I argue that to base African ethics exclusively on the religious or humanistic foundation is to present a deficient view of the origins of African ethics. African ethics is founded on both theocentric and anthropocentric values because life in the African universe is a continuum in which the community include the living as well as the ancestors, the spirits, the gods, the unborn, and plants and animals. African ethics, therefore, is profoundly based on this metaphysico-religious and social worldview.

Introduction

Ethics is natural to all human beings. All human societies, no matter how simple or sophisticated they are, have ethical codes that

govern and guide the behaviour of its members.¹ That ethics is natural to all human societies is not a contentious issue, but the contentious question since the days of Plato is about the source of ethics. In his paper entitled “Could morality have a source?” Chris Heathwood begins with the following comment:

*It is a common idea that morality, or moral truths, if there are any, must have some sort of source. If it is wrong to break a promise, or if our fundamental moral obligation is to maximize happiness, these facts must come from somewhere--perhaps from human nature, or our agreements, or God. Such facts cannot be ungrounded, floating free.*²

Although Heathwood seems to suggest from the above comments that morality may have a source, he is still sceptical about that possibility as read from the rest of his paper.³ The question of the origin of morality dates back to ancient philosophy. In contemporary African Philosophy there is a heated debate as to whether African ethics is based on religious or on humanistic values. On the one hand, we have John Mbiti and other African theologians/philosophers like Bolaji Idowu, who maintain that because religion permeates all aspects of African life and as Mbiti puts it, “there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular...”⁴, religion is at the basis of African ethics. From the same angle, Benezet Bujo submits that “it is hardly conceivable that the African, whose thinking is always set in a religious context, could have a morality without God.”⁵ On the other hand, there are African philosophers like Kwasi Wiredu, John A. I. Bewaji, and Kwame Gyekye, who insist that African ethics is based purely and simply on

¹ Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 23.

² Chris Heathwood, “Could Morality have a Source?” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, April 2012.

³ Ibid.

⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York, Anchor Books, 1970, p. 2.

⁵ Benezet Bujo, “Is there a Specific African Ethic? Towards a Discussion with Western Thought” in Munyaradzi Felix Murove (ed.), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009, pp. 113-128.

humanistic foundations because it is essentially concerned with interpersonal relations between bona fide members of the community. For them, therefore, African ethics is fundamentally anthropocentric.

It should be noted that the debate over the foundations of ethics is a persistent philosophical problem which dates back to the days of Plato. The oldest documented version of this debate is found in Plato's *Euthyphro*. In this dialogue, Socrates asks: "Is conduct right because the gods command it, or do the gods command it because it is right?"⁶ In answer to this perplexing question, some moral theorists, especially those who take a religious stance on the question, maintain that morality is not a question of individual sentiment or custom; it is dependent on God's command. Hence, an action is right because God ordains it, and it is wrong because He prohibits it. This ethical theory has been dubbed the Divine Command Theory. Others, particularly those who defend the secular view of morality, on the other hand, maintain that morality is independent of God's Will and that the good is good not because the gods or God commands it, but because it is right (rationally) in the first place. And this is the position of Socrates in *Euthyphro*.

In this paper, I aim to critically examine these two seemingly contradictory, but complementary, as I shall show, sources of African ethics. I argue that African ethics is founded on both religious and humanist grounds because life in the African universe is a continuum in which the community does not only include the living, but includes the ancestors, the spirits, the gods, and the unborn, who all have an important role to play in the moral life of this theo-anthropocentric community. The paper is divided into four sections. In Section One, I examine the concept of 'African Ethics.' In section Two, I critically discuss the religious basis of African ethics. Here, the analysis centres on the views extant in the literature provided by some prominent African scholars like Mbiti and Idowu. In the third section, I discuss the arguments for the humanistic foundations of African ethics. Prominent here are the arguments of contemporary African philosophers like Kwasi Wiredu, John A. I. Bewaji, and Kwame

⁶ Plato, *Euthyphro*, Translated by Cathal Woods and Ryan Pack 10e-11e. Available at <http://home.southernct.edu/~gillilandr1/200F10/Plato%20Euthyphro.pdf>

Gyekye. In the concluding section, I attempt a synthesis of these two contending sources of African ethics. Here, I show that those who maintain that African ethics is mainly humanistic and this-worldly seem to ignore the fact that in the African universe life is a continuum where there is a close connection between the material and the spiritual world such that it may be very difficult to separate the two spheres. In this section, I borrow from the African theologian and moral philosopher, Bénézet Bujo, who argues that the African community is a “three-dimensional community”⁷ and that if in morality African thought puts a special accent on interpersonal relations, it does not mean that God is excluded or has no role to play in morality.⁸ In the African worldview, God is present in all aspects of life, although God is seldom mentioned in the Christian manner. God is considered to be at the centre of life and without him there is no being.⁹

African Ethics

Ethics is a sub-field of philosophy that is concerned with the principles, norms and standards of right and wrong in human conduct. It is commonly used interchangeably with the terms morality or moral philosophy. **Ethics** is concerned with how men/women ought to behave, and why it is wrong to behave in certain ways, and right to behave in certain other ways. It is a science that studies the reasons why certain kinds of behaviour are morally wrong and condemnable and why other kinds are morally right and praiseworthy. **Ethics** is an essential aspect of human social life as its principal aim is to promote “harmonious relationship within a ... society, the control and enhancement of its other institutions and individuals, the protection of its land and its individual members, and as a result of success in that area, the survival of that society as an

⁷Bénézet Bujo, “Differentiations in African Ethics” in William Schweiker (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 423-437.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

entity.”¹⁰ It is by living a moral life that one can give meaning to his/her life and to the lives of others, those with whom s/he entertains a reciprocal relationship, and thereby ensures peace and harmony in the community as a whole. This therefore implies that ethics is universal. And if ethics is natural to human beings, then it may be correct to say that there is no stable human society that is not supported or sustained by moral principles, values, and standards.

African ethics is the application of moral principles, codes, and standards to regulate human behaviour in the African society. African ethics is a sub-field of African philosophy and Wiredu defines it “as the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interest of the individual to those of others in society.”¹¹ Considering that Africa is a very vast and culturally diverse continent, to avoid a certain reductionist use of the term Africa, it would be prudent to define what I mean by African ethics in this chapter. By African ethics, I refer to the values of the generally sub-Saharan or Bantu-speaking people excluding the “Arabs in North Africa and white Afrikaners in South Africa...”¹² Although sub-Saharan Africa is also very diverse in culture; there are great similarities between these cultures.

The core of African ethics is the intrinsically interpersonal understanding of the human person as a socially incomplete being as characterised in this saying which is commonly shared in the sub-Saharan moral worldview: “A person is a person through/because (of) other persons” or as Mbiti sums it up: “I am because we are.”¹³ For Bénézet Bujo, “it is exactly the community which enables the self-realisation of the individual. According to the African representation of values, it is not possible to achieve the ethical ideal individually or as a strictly personal achievement.”¹⁴ This kind of

¹⁰ Segun Gbadegesin, “Origins of African Ethics” in William Schweiker (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 413-422.

¹¹ Kwasi Wiredu, “The Moral Foundations of an African Culture” in P.H Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.) *The African Philosophy Reader* London, Routledge, New Fetter Lane, 1998, pp.

¹² Thaddeus Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Volume 15, Number 3, 2007, pp. 321–341.

¹³ John S. Mbiti, op.cit.,

¹⁴ Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community* (Tr. By C. N. Nganda) Nairobi, Paulines Publications

ethics has been described as communitarian.¹⁵ In what follows, I shall attempt to show the religious foundations of African ethics.

The Theocentric Foundation of African Ethics

One of the statements frequently cited in support of the view that African ethics is essentially theocentric is that made by the Kenyan philosopher/theologian, J. S. Mbiti, that “Africans are notoriously religious...”¹⁶ He says:

Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.”¹⁷

Religion shapes and informs the intuitions, values and sensibilities of the African such that religion is always appealed to directly or indirectly in whatever thing s/he does. The African is profoundly religious “in the sense that everything he does is guided by the hopes and fears of not only the living but the departed, the

Africa, 1997, p. 28.

¹⁵ See Mbiti, op.cit., Ifeanyi Menkiti, “On the normative conception of a person” in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 324–331 and “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought” in Richard A. Wright (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, New York, University Press of America, 1984; Thaddeus Metz, “Towards an African Moral Theory,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Volume 15, Number 3, 2007, pp. 321–341; Mbih J. Tosam, “The Relevance of Kom Ethics to African Development” *International Journal of Philosophy*, 2014; 2(3): 36-47 (<http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/j/ijp>)

¹⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York, Anchor Books Edition, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

gods or divinities and the Omnipotent Being.”¹⁸ In this logic, therefore, it may be difficult, or even impossible, to conceive of an African ethics that is completely divorced from this extremely religious outlook.

In another text, *Introduction to African Religion*, Mbiti argues further for the religious basis of African ethics when he points out that it is commonly believed in most African societies that “God gave moral order to people so that they might live happily and in harmony with one another. Through the moral order, customs and institutions have arisen in all societies to safeguard the life of the individual and the community of which he is part.”¹⁹ In the same perspective, Chibuezi C. Udeani corroborates this view when he writes:

*Traditional African spirituality and ethics are, in a way, a triangular relationship which incorporates, firstly, the natural beings in their relationship with other natural beings. Secondly it pertains to the relationship between natural and spiritual beings, and then that of existing spiritual beings in their relation to one another. Ethical and moral issues go beyond the issues that arise within the context of interactions among natural beings. That is to say, issues of ethics do not only come into question when considering the implications of human actions vis-a-vis other humans and animals. It has wider and deeper dimensions.*²⁰

What this means is that morality is not only concerned with inter-human relationships; it goes beyond and above human-to-human interaction. This is because in the African universe, the distinction between the natural and the spiritual spheres is not neat and tidy. There is a close relation between these aspects of reality in a hierarchy

¹⁸ G. O. Ozumba, “African Ethics” cited by Etta, Emmanuel E. and Asukwo, Offiong O. in “The Nature of African Ethics” *INTERNET AFRREV: An International Online Multi-disciplinary Journal* Vol. 1(2) June, 2012:55-60 afrevjo.net/journals/internetafrev/vol1_no2_art9_etta&asukwo_africanethics_june2012.pdf (accessed 12/08/2014)

¹⁹ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religions*, London, Heinemann, 1991, p. 41.

²⁰ Chibuezi C. Udeani, “Traditional African Spirituality and Ethics- A Panacea to Leadership Crisis and Corruption in Africa?” *Phronimon*, Volume 9, Number 2, 2008, pp. 65-72.

of being with God at the apex, followed by the spirits, the gods, ancestors, humans, the unborn, and plants and animals.

The community in this worldview is a single continuum that includes and involves all these facets of reality. It is also in this sense that the moral community is not only limited to the human or natural world; African ethics transcends the natural, "...moral issues, even when they are issues between human beings, also involve the relationship between spiritual and human beings."²¹ For example, what the living does or fails to do affects the world of the living-dead and the yet-to-be-born. On the other hand, what the living-dead do or fail to do affects the lives of the living and the unborn. From this standpoint, therefore, the ethical life consists in maintaining a balance or equilibrium between the various components that make up the African community.²² Because the community is a continuum that includes the natural and the supernatural,

*The sense of community is not restricted to relations with human beings alone. There is community with nature since man is part of nature and is expected to cooperate with it; and this sense of community with nature is often expressed in terms of identity and kinship, friendliness and respect ... The need to remain in harmony with nature often takes a religious form when features of environment are personified ... Remaining in harmony with nature also means preserving nature, hence the concept of taboo as a ritual prohibition designed to protect nature is found in African societies.*²³

It is in line with the above view of an ethic that transcends real human relationships that K. A. Opoku thinks that "Africans assume firmly that, in order for the well-being and wholeness of human life to be maintained, much depends on cosmic harmony."²⁴ For some scholars the basis of morality in the African society is the fulfilment

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ K. A. Opoku, "African Traditional Religion," in: Olupona, J. K., Nyang, S. S., *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti* cited by Chibuezi C. Udeani, Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

of obligations to other members of the community including the living and the living-dead.²⁵

Because in the African community interpersonal relationship is given a special position, this has made most uncritical observers to conclude that African ethics is essentially anthropocentric/atheistic and not theocentric/theistic. However, as Francis P. Kasoma has shrewdly pointed out, the relationship between God and the human being, which forms the basis “for a theocentric ethics, can only be realised through an anthropocentric approach. The African anthropocentricism and theocentricism do not exclude one another; they build a unity, on whose account god could only be talked of anthropocentrically.”²⁶ In the same light, Chibuezi cites Rucker who maintains that:

The man-to-man relationship and man-to-God relationship are inseparable”; “If a man wishes to be in the right with God, he must be in the right with men, that is, he must subordinate his interests as an individual to the moral order of society (Evans- Pritchard); “So long as your relationship with other men, both living and departed, is right, then you know that God is pleased with you, and there is no need to bother God (Kibicho).”²⁷

In the African worldview, it is commonly believed that “some of the departed and the spirits keep watch over people to make sure that they observe moral laws and are punished when they break them.”²⁸ African ethics assigns a special premium to societal conduct, which stems from the African understanding that the individual exists only in a relational web. For example:

Much importance is attached to ancestors among the Efiks and other African societies since they are seen as the guardians of traditional ethics and

²⁵ Francis P. Kasoma, “The Foundations of African Ethics (Afriethics) and the Professional Practice of Journalism: The Case for Society Media-Centred Morality” available at archive.lib.msu.edu/.../African%20Journals/.../africa%20media%20revie

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ H. Rucker, *Afrikanische Theologie – Darstellung und Dialog* cited by Chibuezi C. Udeani, op.cit.

²⁸ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, London, Heinemann, 1975, p. 175.

morality. When people have the idea of functioning to the benefit of their families after death they will endeavour to live a good life here on earth to qualify them to become ancestors. This is one of the ways Africans believe that the Supreme Being rewards those who are highly moral even at death. The implication here is that the ancestors continue to be pre-occupied with regulating the affairs of their communities even in their temporary absence. In a sense, they are still concerned about the moral integrity of their communities, specifically for the fear that, disregard of what constitutes moral virtue renders the community vulnerable to harmful spirits and subsequent destruction.²⁹

The dead/ancestors are usually spoken of or treated by their relations as daily participants in the lives and activities of living members of their families. In traditional Kom Society, for example, (and even in some parts of contemporary Kom Society), it was unacceptable to throw an object outside, in the open air, at night without obtaining the permission of the spirits who are believed to hover around at night. It is believed that one may provoke the wrath of the spirits if s/he acted as if they did not exist or one did not care about them. This profoundly metaphysical outlook influences and shapes the ethical life of the community; and from this background, therefore, it may be incomplete to consider African ethics as purely humanistic.

The Anthropocentric Foundation of African Ethics

In the preceding section, I have discussed the ways in which religion may be at the basis of morality in Africa. Some critics of the religious foundation of African ethics maintain that most Christian researchers on African religion like Mbiti and some of his followers are largely influenced by a Western Christian outlook, and argue that African ethics is essentially religious in nature and by this simple fact religion is at the root of African ethics. But this view seems misguided

²⁹ Etta Emmanuel E. and Asukwo Offiong O., "The Nature of African Ethics" *INTERNET AFRREV: An International Online Multi-disciplinary Journal* Vol. 1(2) June, 2012:55-60.
afrrvjo.net/journals/internetafrrv/vol1_no2_art9_etta&asukwo_africanethics_june2012.pdf (accessed 12/08/2014)

for some critics such as Wiredu, Gyekye, and Bewaji. According to these scholars, religion is not at the basis of African morality. Moral standards, beliefs and concepts do not derive from religion, and do not depend on the prescriptions or proscriptions of a deity, an ancestor, or the will of God, although the gods also approve of right and disapprove of wrong. For them, African ethics is fundamentally humanistic. It is the welfare of members of the community that it seeks and not to please a deity or a supernatural being. The human community, where there is unrestricted interaction between free and self-determined, but interdependent rational agents, is the setting par excellence of morality.

In support of the anthropocentric and secular nature of African ethics, Wiredu says “traditional African thinking about the foundations of morality is refreshingly non-supernaturalist.”³⁰ For him, African traditional ethics is deeply humanistic and pragmatic. The deities may have a role to play in morality, but this is only insofar as they recommend good and reproach bad behaviour, but not that certain behaviours are good because God or the gods commend them, or that certain kinds of actions are bad because they do not approve of them. Wiredu contends:

*Of course, immoral conduct is held to be hateful to God, the Supreme Being, and even to the lesser gods. But the thought is not that something is good because God approves of it but rather that God approves of it because it is good in the first place—a distinction which, as Socrates noted in the context of a different culture, does not come easily to every pious mind.*³¹

Bewaji corroborates this view when he says:

The injunctions of morality, insofar as they are related to religion in the African environment, will be found to be motivated by humanistic considerations. Thus the invocation of the Supreme Being, the divinities, the ancestors, and other forces in moral matters is mainly intended to lend legitimacy, through an already reinforced mechanism, to what is often taken

³⁰ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 6.

³¹ Ibid.

*for granted as morally obligatory in a humanistic sense. Being morally upright is not as much a matter of pleasing the supernatural forces as it is of promoting human welfare.*³²

According to Bewaji, the supernatural is mentioned in ethics only to reinforce an already humanistic ethics; it is not used to suggest that African ethical intuitions are founded on religion or God/god. For this reason, Bewaji maintains that: “devotion to the deities is not as much in the interest of the deities as it is in the interest of the people; and when a deity fails to bring benefit to society, people feel free to sever the relationship.”³³ Thus, it is not the case that only the deities sanction people for misdeeds, the people may also snub the gods, if they fail to deliver the goods to the community. It is from this perspective that Gyekye argues that: “All this implies, surely, that it would be correct to assert that, rather than regarding African ethics as religious (or, religious-based), it would be more correct to regard African religion as ethical.”³⁴

For the African, to be human is to be a morally upright person. It is not because we want to avoid the wrath of God that we do the good; it is because doing the good is what makes us human, *qua* human, and not beasts (*nyamsi nka'* as the Kom put it). This means that humans do the good not out of compulsion or fear of punishment from a deity, but freely. Moral responsibility is ascribed only to humans because of their rational capacity. According to those who maintain that African ethics is humanistic; a moral worldview which does not force individuals to do the good or to please a deity is richer and more credible than one which forces individuals to do the good to avoid the wrath of God. In the same light, and drawing inspiration from the Nso'/African worldview, Godfrey Tangwa insists on the fundamentally anthropocentric character of African ethics. He argues that although Nso' worldview is “communitarian,

³² John A. I. Bewaji, “Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture” in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004, pp. 396-403.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Kwame Gyekye, “African Ethics” 2010
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/african-ethics/#HumFouAfrMor>
(accessed 14/02/2014)

it goes beyond anthropological communality” and “even beyond biocommunitarianism.”³⁵ For him, it “may be more appropriately described as eco-bio-communitarianism”³⁶ (because it includes humans and the rest of nature). “Nso’ morality,” Tangwa adds, “is ultimately and fundamentally human centred in so far as its teleological end and limits are defined by human well-being.”³⁷ Supernatural beings and non-human animals are exempted from moral responsibility and are not vulnerable to the consequences of their own moral errors.³⁸

Wiredu and Gyekye make a strong case for the secular, anthropocentric basis of morality in Akan/African culture. Barry Hallen summarises their view under five main points.

The first is the fact that “there is no such thing as an institutional religion in Akan culture.”³⁹ The view that the universe was created by God with different deities and supernatural forces within is taken for granted. For this reason, the importance of these gods or forces to human beings is that they can be used for private and practical aims “if correctly addressed and respected.”⁴⁰ The purpose is not to worship these deities because of their sanctity, but because the worshipper intends to derive some specific benefit(s) as a result of such worship. And the continuation of such adoration will depend on whether the gods deliver the goods for which they are worshipped. If they succeed, then the people will continue to adore them, but if they fail, they may be despised by the people.

The second, by Gyekye, is based on the idea that there is no prophetic religious tradition in Africa as it is the case with the Christian and Muslim religious traditions:

³⁵ Godfrey B. Tangwa, “Bioethics: An African Perspective” *Bioethics*, Volume 10, Number 3, 1996, pp.183-199.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ K. Wiredu and K. Gyekye (eds.), *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, I.

Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy and UNESCO, 1992, p. 194. Cited by B. Hallen, op.cit.

⁴⁰ Barry Hallen, op.cit.

*The doctrinal system of a religion revealed by God to a single person, the founder, invariably includes elaborate prescriptions to guide the ethical life of the people who can accept and practice that religion. A coherent system of ethics can be founded upon such divinely revealed commands . . . It is clear, however, that traditional African religion cannot be said to be a religion whose doctrines were embodied in a revelation.*⁴¹

A revealed religion contains in its revelation a body of moral principles and values considered to be part of the will of God. An ethical tradition that is based on religion is therefore an essential element of a revealed religion. Because African traditional religion is not a revealed religion, it is not possible for the people to have access to the will of God and the knowledge of principles and values upon which an articulate moral scheme can be established.⁴²

The third argument is connected to the first two. Since morality is meant to serve human beings, humans are the ones who formulate moral principles and values for human interpersonal relationships, which are considered to be “the most important of human needs.”⁴³ For Gyekye and Wiredu, therefore, what is good/right is what promotes human welfare as defined by human beings themselves, for their common interest, and not something defined by a deity or a god.

The fourth argument is that the principal foundation of moral education is the family. There are no institutions or institutionalised religions that are at the basis of morality or that is used to reinforce morality.⁴⁴

The fifth, and the last, is that from the four claims above, it is evident that African ethics is “purely personal, being just a tenet of

⁴¹ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* cited by Barry Hallen in “African Ethics?” in William Schweiker (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, op.cit.

⁴² K. Gyekye, “African Ethics” 2010
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/african-ethics/#HumFouAfrMor>
(accessed 12/09/2014)

⁴³ K. Wiredu and K. Gyekye (eds.) *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I*.

Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy and UNESCO, 1992, p. 194. Cited by B. Hallen, op.cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

an individual's voluntary metaphysic, devoid of social entanglements."⁴⁵

From this perspective, therefore, "the revised role of religion," for Wiredu and Gyekye, "in this overall humanitarian ethical and moral schema is said to be supportive rather than foundational. In certain situations religious beliefs serve as reinforcement for moral behaviour that, on logically independent humanitarian grounds, is considered improper."⁴⁶

Gbadegesin, in line with the anthropocentric foundation of African ethics, argues that "in traditional Africa, humanity is not made for religion, religion is made for humanity."⁴⁷ For this reason, the gods are worshipped if they perform their humanly desired function, if they do not, they can be rejected. In this sense, therefore, the gods may be censored if they fail to deliver. The role of religion, as well as morality, is to promote the well-being of the people.⁴⁸ Gbadegesin further argues that in the African understanding, religion is not divorced from daily social life "because it is part of life and it is for life as we live it; it is this-worldly. Religion is to benefit human and communal life; hence the conception of the other world in the image of this world. Religion has to be constantly there, even at beer parties, as Mbiti notes."⁴⁹

The anthropocentric account of the foundations of African ethics gives very little or secondary role to religion in African moral life. A morally acceptable behaviour is a behaviour that adheres with the principle and ideals that society considers commendable, values which promote human wellbeing. A moral upright person must be compassionate, honest, truthful, kind and open-hearted, and peaceful. These are all qualities that have to do with interpersonal relations, and for this reason, a real person is one whose behaviour brings people together. It is informed by the consideration that one cannot live an ethical life in isolation. There is a Kom proverb which emphasises this deep communitarian and anthropocentric nature of

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Segun Gbadegesin, *op.cit.*

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Kom and African ethics in general: *Ninyin nin joft kisi àvìṅà*, which may be rendered in English as self-alienation/alooftness is good only for a witch/wizard. This proverb underscores the idea that as imperfect beings, our humanity is a shared one and no one can live a moral life in isolation.

The Complexity of the Religious and the Human in African Ethics

In this section, I shall borrow a great deal from Bujo who, in my view, has provided a very insightful and comprehensive account of the foundations of African ethics than authors like Mbiti, Idowu, Wiredu, Bewaji and Gyekye, who either base African ethics exclusively on religion or on humanistic social values. Bujo shows that there is a necessary link between the religious and social or humanistic origins of African ethics.

According to Bujo, it is difficult to separate African ethics from its religious and humanistic dimensions in African social life and even from the rest of nature as there exists a necessary and complementary “dialectic” relation between these three. The (traditional) African community is a “three-dimensional community.”⁵⁰ Bujo maintains that the fact that in African moral philosophy a special place is accorded to inter-human relations does not in any sense imply that God is excluded in African moral thought. He puts this appositely thus: “In traditional African conception, God is an unquestioned postulate, even though God is rarely mentioned. One knows once and for all that God is first and that without God nothing comes and nothing survives.”⁵¹ There are myths, legends, and tales which provide evidence that God is not absent from the life of the individual and the community.⁵²

To emphasise the fact that God plays a central role in traditional African ethics Bujo argues further that:

Most of the time in everyday life African morality takes place without necessary and constant mention of God, though God is by no means absent.

⁵⁰ Benezet Bujo, op.cit.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

*African ethics concentrates its attention in a very special fashion on the individual and the community. Africans know that humans are indebted to God for all their undertakings and that, by articulating their morality within an interpersonal relation with fellow human beings and the cosmos as a whole, they ultimately praise the same God. Insofar as one promotes life in this world, one does God's will...*⁵³

It is usually the human dimension of African moral life that is most visible. God is said to reward people for good behaviour. For example, in most African cultures, it is believed that God provides abundantly to the compassionate, and to the kind and open-hearted. Therefore, Buju concludes that the basis of morality in this three-dimensional community does not have as its foundation a Cartesian or Kantian philosophical conception. What defines a person morally is not rationality in the Cartesian and Kantian sense. It is Social interactions that shapes and defines this “tripartite community” and constitutes the basis of morality. The Cartesian principle “*cogito ergo sum*” falters. Another principle supplants it right away: *cognatus sum, ergo sumus*, because I am related to the others, not only I, but also we, together, exist.”⁵⁴

Although interpersonal relationship is central to African ethics, God is still given a prominent position. There is a hierarchy of the moral ideal which ends with God in the highest position. Bujo cites the example of the Banade people of Zaire (The Democratic Republic of Congo), where the people talk of five mountains considered as the moral ideals. Here, the human being may attain moral excellence “only after having climbed all five. The first mountain refers to the duties of the human person towards God—to be considered as the basis of moral life. All other ethical ideals, represented by the other four mountains, depend on the first one and regulate the relationship between the members of the community.”⁵⁵

Some African researchers on ethics agree partially with Mbiti that God is the giver of moral order and therefore is the source of morality in the African context. Concerning Mbiti's position that “...

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Bujo, Ibid.

⁵⁵ Bujo, “Is there a Specific African Ethics?,” op.cit.

God gave moral order to people so that they might live happily and in harmony with one another”⁵⁶, which for him implies that God is the source of African ethics, Gbadegesin argues that Mbiti’s view could be given a second and more suitable explanation thus: “traditional Africans believe that God gives the moral sense to each person, and they use the moral sense to fashion the moral order and its structure. The moral sense of right and wrong, the sense of decency, the sense of fittingness, appropriateness, beauty and ugliness....”⁵⁷ Interpreted this way, “moral sense is contextual, spatial, and temporal.”⁵⁸ In this logic, therefore, good and evil, right and wrong, may vary from one community to another. It is the moral sense (or moral conscience), given by God that permits us to differentiate between good and evil; right and wrong. For Gbadegesin, “human beings create the moral order through the use of the moral sense given to them by God.”⁵⁹ If Africans believe according to this interpretation, that they receive moral sense from God, this would imply that religion reinforces and shapes moral norms.⁶⁰ From this, it may be concluded that religion serves to enforce standards and values in African culture.

From this perspective, Etta and Asukwo contend that “discussing African ethics within the context of African religion is not a digression but complementary.”⁶¹ We cannot talk about African ethics without making mention of African religion and we cannot talk about African traditional religion in exclusion of African ethics. They both complement and reinforce each other, “one cannot touch one of them without causing the whole to vibrate. Humans are not only part of the cosmos, but they are also the summary of its totality, so to speak.”⁶² It is from an understanding of African ethics and religion

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Etta Emmanuel E. and Asukwo, Offiong O. in “The Nature of African Ethics” *INTERNET AFRREV: An International Online Multi-disciplinary Journal* Vol. 1(2) June, 2012:55-60

afrevjo.net/journals/internet afrrev/vol1_no2_art9_etta&asukwo_africanethics_june2012.pdf (accessed 12/08/2014)

⁶² Ibid.

as complementary that Prozesky argues that “the moral culture of traditional African societies” and their “religious beliefs were fused with moral values to form a single whole.”⁶³ In African ethics therefore, the good/right is not good/right because God or the gods command, God/gods only reinforces the good/right because it is good/right in the first place. The human person, social order and harmony are at the heart of African ethics. It is not an ethic founded on religion alone but also based on humanitarian values greatly reinforced by religion and as Buju puts it, “although the human person stands in the centre of African morals, the position of God is distinctly emphasised.”⁶⁴

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it may be proper to say that African ethics is founded on both theocentric and anthropocentric values. The community in the African worldview is three-dimensional in nature consisting of the living, the living-dead and the unborn and plants and animals. Ethics is concerned with all these members of the community. There is a close link between African religion, ethics and the rest of nature, and as Buju maintains, the religious foundations of African ethics “should not conceal and downplay its anthropocentric dimension.”⁶⁵ The fact that the most visible part of African moral life is seen in the community should not also cloud its theocentric dimension and character. The African community, and, by extension, the ethical community, is therefore not only limited to this physical world; it transcends the corporeal to the ancestral and spiritual world. The idea that African ethics is basically anthropocentric is therefore a very narrow conception of African ethics.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Buju, “Is there a Specific African Ethics?,” *op.cit.*

⁶⁵ Buju, “Is there a Specific African Ethics?,” *op.cit.*

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Multicultural/Multiethnic Divide: An Interrogation of Politics, Identity and Culture towards Transcending the Multiculturalism Conundrum

Fidel Tanju

The whole world had one language and a common speech...and Yabweb said, "They are one people and they have one language...Come! Let us go down and confuse their language so that they will no longer understand each other.

(Gen. 11: 1, 6-7)

Abstract

There is a multiplicity of layers of 'identity' resulting from the increasingly pervading strata of cultural diversity. These layers of identity include: civilisation, regional or transnational, national, sub-national and collective. This is what occasions the challenge of multiculturalism. The way politics, identity and culture relate to deal with this challenge, especially in the Cameroonian context seems rather problematic. This even gives the impression that being a multicultural society with different cultural groups alongside intricate multi-layered identities is an evil to be avoided rather than a good to be properly harnessed. The major onus remains for those in charge to ensure that socio-political arrangements do not disadvantage the cultures who say in terms of power and incidence are in the minority; all in a bid preclude any occurrence of cultural imperialism. Much as conflicts in this area appear steeper than normal, I argue that the Rawlsian notion of Public Reason serves as a proper trailblazer in any real attempt at significantly shrinking the multiculturalism conundrum to insignificance.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that Cameroon manifests a multiplicity of cultures and cultural realities. The credibility of this is enhanced

by the fact that Cameroon is home to about 250 languages, classifiable into about several language groups. The most prominent group is the Niger-Congo language group, which includes sub-groups like: the Senegambian Language or Fulfulde and the Adamawa languages that are prominent in the north; Bantu languages, high-flying in the South and encompassing speakers like the Ewondo, Fang, Bassa, Baka, Douala, Bakweri and Bantanga, *inter alia*. Other less well-known language groups include the Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages.

If we agree with Frantz Fanon that to “speak a language is to take on a world, a culture”¹ and that a language is the vehicle of culture, then we can say with all and sundry that Cameroon is multicultural; a good case study for the phenomenon of multiculturalism. All the same, multiculturalism is not that simplistic. This is the reason why John Arthur in citing Nathan Blum, says “‘Multiculturalism’ is a term that has... both ‘great currency’ and ‘imprecise usage’.”² Arthur further explains that the meaning of multiculturalism is very vulnerable to dispute albeit its wide use.³

According to Susan Moller Okin, multiculturalism represents the idea that “people in other cultures, foreign and domestic are human beings, too – moral equals, entitled to equal respect and concern, and not to be discounted or treated as a subordinate caste.”⁴ In coherence with her specific circumstances, her discussion is laden with certain important philosophical ideas, which crave commonplace acceptance: equality, respect and, implicitly, tolerance. Such ideas are both essential to the understanding of the notion ‘multiculturalism’ and intrinsic – in their neglect – to the problems surrounding the phenomenon of multiculturalism. It is in the same wave length with Okin that when Nathan Glazer says multiculturalism “has, in a word, won” he means that a greater attention to minorities and women and

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (Translated by Charles Lam Markmann), New York, Grove Press, 1967, p.38.

² John Arthur, “Multiculturalism” in H. LaFollette (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Practical Ethics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press Inc., 2003, p. 413.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ Susan Moller Okin, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” in J. Cohen, M. Howard and M. C. Nussbaum (eds.), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 4; Also cf. Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p. 414.

the significance of the role they play – he specifies their role in American History and social studies and literature classes – has become indubitable; has won.⁵

In sharp contrast to the above optimism about and acceptance of the phenomenon of multiculturalism, is a devastatingly negative perspective. To capture this turn, John Arthur avails himself of the claims, amongst others, of the political commentator and author Andrew Sullivan. Sullivan, as presented by Arthur, would have us believe that multiculturalism is obsolete at best; it simply “doesn’t work. Nobody buys it any more. Its most avid supporters are licking their wounds and recanting their past absurdities.”⁶ For James Caesar, multiculturalism “perpetuates a perverse psychology.”⁷

From the foregoing, it seems utterly lucid that any simplistic/literal understanding of multiculturalism in terms of many cultures is simply disingenuous. According to Chris Barker,

*The idea of a multicultural society ... represents a liberal democratic attempt to promote ethnic/racial equality. It is premised on the idea of displaying tolerance towards a range of cultural practices within the contexts of the nation-state...As such, multiculturalism aims to express respect for and indeed celebration of difference.*⁸

Laudable as this is, the very process of relativizing culture, which it favours, has its own ensuing difficulties. In lay man parlance, multiculturalism like any other ‘coin’ has two sides. Yet whichever side we choose, the fact remains that multiculturalism “includes a set of political ideas that extend beyond what is often thought of as

⁵ Nathan Glazer, *We are all Multiculturalists Now*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997, p.14; see also Amy Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1994, especially his definition of Multiculturalism on page 3.

⁶A. Sullivan, as cited in Arthur, “Multiculturalism” 414.

⁷ James Caesar, “Multiculturalism and American Liberal Democracy” in A. Metzger, J. Weinberger and R. Zinman (eds.), *Multiculturalism and American Democracy*, Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 1998, 155 ; see Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p. 414.

⁸ Chris Barker, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2004, p. 127.

culture.”⁹ If culture is simply the “capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” or simply “a vocabulary of tradition and convention,” Arthur concludes, “many topics surrounding multiculturalism are not cultural issues: gay rights, economic justice, abortion, affirmative action, and racism, while undoubtedly important, are not disputes grounded in different vocabularies and traditions.”¹⁰ Again, though these are not cultural issues strictly speaking, they arise in multicultural discussion only in so far as they find expression or foundation in the culture within which the discussion is taking place. Worthy of note is the fact that multicultural discussions arise from the cultural intercourse that globalisation comes with.

I find it fit to observe that for the cultures in Cameroon and Africa at large, topics like gay rights, racism, and abortion etc., do not come up; they are not Cameroonian or African cultural issues although they are central to multicultural discussions. The reverse might also be true: not all Cameroonian cultural issues come up during discussions in multiculturalism. Therefore, ‘many cultures’ and multiculturalism *non convertuntur*; they are not interchangeable. Moreover, discussions on cultural pluralism/diversity revolve around – for the most part if not exclusively – the respect, involvement and accommodation of manifold cultural identities within the wider context of a national identity, and to some possible albeit unfortunate extent, the ‘de-essentialisation’ of those national identities; and this also majorly concerns multiculturalism. Therefore, this paper, alongside many others, rightly treats multiculturalism and cultural plurality/diversity as synonyms.

The confines of this paper do not afford us the possibility of satisfactorily studying the genesis of the idea of ‘multiculturalism’ or examining the factors whose confluence results in multiculturalism. This paper does not attempt a comprehensive study of the conceptual issues surrounding multiculturalism like: the intricacies and difference between the descriptive and normative uses of the word; the appropriate connotation of a ‘culture’; the difference

⁹ Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p. 415.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

between ethnic groups and national minorities; and what a ‘majority culture’ actually means.

I am well aware of the fact that the challenge of multiculturalism is one that arises as a result of the multiple layers of ‘identity’ resulting from the increasingly pervading strata of cultural diversity; and that these layers of identity include: civilisation, regional or transnational, national, sub-national and collective. Yet, in this paper, I focus on the normative underpinnings at the sub-national and national levels albeit not exclusive of the other levels, especially because of their interwoven nature.

In this paper therefore, I intend to examine the relationship between politics, identity and culture in a bid to contribute to tackling the multicultural conundrum. My first working assumption is that Cameroon – to which I shall make this paper relevant, as much as possible – is a multicultural society, a society with many divergent cultural groups alongside complex and multi-layered identities. My task is to succinctly focus on the intricacies of making appropriate socio-political arrangements within such a society; arrangements that preclude, as much as possible, any occurrence of cultural imperialism. This will inextricably involve discussions around the specifics of personal/cultural identity, social solidarity, and group rights or the politics of difference.

My trajectory is simple though not naïve. My next move is to examine the vernacular politics in this conundrum. Thereafter, I will turn my attention to defining the limits of toleration within a society characterised by multiculturalism or cultural pluralism/diversity. Finally, I shall be examining the input of the Rawlsian notion of Public Reason, in a bid to determine a potent way to deal with a profound cultural conflict as one of the challenges of multiculturalism.

Vernacular Politics

It seems unfortunately true to maintain that irrespective of the much talk about ‘regionalism’ and regional balance, and the prioritisation of the minority – women and youths – in various ways, the centre of attention for policy makers in Cameroon has scarcely

been multiculturalism. This political dimension of the issue is particularly intricate, especially when we join Will Kymlicka to ask how governments ought to “recognise languages, draw boundaries, and distribute powers” in a multicultural society, not leaving out the issue of government acknowledgement of ‘group rights’.¹¹ To this genuine worry, Arthur adds: “Should law be used to ensure the continuation of cultures? And, if so, what does that requirement mean in practice?”¹²

I am vehement that one cannot talk about culture without language. In fact, Kymlicka’s definition of culture “emphasises a common history and language.”¹³ As such, I will limit my endeavours here to the issue which Kymlicka is grappling with. This will be done confident that such a move will at the same time cater for Arthur’s worry about the “continuation of cultures” at least.

It seems utterly lucid that in *Multicultural Citizenship*, Kymlicka’s endeavour is to erect a theory of distinctively cultural rights on liberal foundations.¹⁴ It must also be mentioned that Kymlicka intends to use the logic underlying the Rawlsian liberal principles to help cultural minorities, and this is the reason why we shall also be making use of these Rawlsian principles in our discussion of the pertinence of the Rawlsian Public Reason.

Kymlicka distinguishes two varieties of cultural minorities. The first is what he calls ‘national minorities’. By this he refers to individual societal cultures – and by this he means the entire assortment of values and customs institutionally incarnated in social, political and economic life¹⁵ – within larger multinational states. In our Cameroonian context, we can say that the South West and North West Regions – Anglophones – are national minorities. Characteristically, these societal cultures are self-sufficient and autonomous; but beyond that they also afford sundry social roles across the full scope of human actions for their members, for instance, educational facilities, health care services, and

¹¹ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 113; Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p. 418.

¹² Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p. 418.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

¹⁴ Cf. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. 1-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-90.

transportation infrastructure. The extent to which the aforementioned national minorities in Cameroon manifest these characteristics of national minorities is also a food for thought especially now when we seem to be licking the wounds of the reunification whose 50th anniversary we have somewhat reluctantly celebrated.

The second variety of cultural minorities, which Kymlicka discusses in contrast to the foregoing, is 'ethnic groups'. These, for him, are immigrants who naturally yearn for integration into the societal culture of their host society. The Cameroonian example we can give here is the Bamilekes in Yaounde, the Ewondos in Mankon, or the Bakweris in Bafut. Like the national minorities, these ethnic groups also ask for acknowledgment of their distinctiveness or identity. However, unlike the national minorities, they desire in one way or another to become full members of the larger society. Vices like tribalism, nepotism and other similar '-isms' ensure that this full integration into the larger society never see the light of day; that full and equal membership in the larger society never become a reality.

For this reason, Kymlicka proposes three types of multicultural or 'group differentiated' rights. The first, 'self-government rights,' provides some degree of political autonomy to the national minorities, in the form of control over the groups within their territory. Next, the 'polyethnic rights' provide legal and financial support to ethnic groups in the quest for maintaining their identity within the society at large. As such, these 'polyethnic rights' go beyond the universal rights against discrimination afforded all citizens to rights designed to benefit particular groups; for example rights like public funding of cultural practices and exemptions from laws on clothing, language or the sacrifice of animals, which could disadvantage particular groups. The last type, 'representation rights' affords quota representation in a legislative body to both varieties of cultural minorities.¹⁶

Formidable as this 'group rights' theory is, Kymlicka's real decisive move in constructing his stout understanding of liberalism is his trans-cultural liberal meta-principle: individual autonomy.

¹⁶*Ibid.* pp.26-33; Arthur, "Multiculturalism," p. 420.

Suffice it to note that this autonomy is not absolute auto-regulation. It is freedom within options. Kymlicka himself puts it like this: “[freedom] involves making choices amongst various options, and our societal culture not only provides these options but also makes them meaningful to us.”¹⁷ These options, which are borne by the societal cultures, inhere in customs, cultural narratives and vocabularies of tradition and convention.

If truth be told, Kymlicka’s triune multicultural rights envisage the neutralisation of the power of the external preferences in the cultural/multicultural space and afford members relative autonomy in the determination of the cultural identity and fate. As a corollary, the systemic disadvantage suffered by many minority cultural groups would be mitigated. In other words, government acknowledgement of these ‘group differentiated’ cultural rights, will solve the linguistic and geo-political conundrums of multiculturalism, and as such ensure the continuation of cultures alongside the positive repercussions of such a continuation.

It might prove very naïve to imagine that this is a conclusive statement on multicultural rights. When it comes to actual group to group intercourse, ‘oppression’ and ‘dominance’ seem unavoidable. In *Multiculturalism and the politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young is preoccupied with the injustices that groups experience in their sharing of cultural forms, customs, and ways of life, all of which determine their common sense of identity.¹⁸ Young is particularly interested in the victims of two main forms of injustice. The first form, oppression, which he defines as “constrains on self-development” can also be understood as institutional prevention of the exercise of freedom in the area of one’s abilities. The second form, dominance/domination, refers to the prevention of group participation in determining “the conditions of their action”.¹⁹

Arthur adumbrates the five forms of injustices that Young identifies: “exploitation (transfer of results of labour), marginalisation

¹⁷ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 83.

¹⁸ Iris Marion Young, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990, 186; also Cf. Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p. 418.

¹⁹ Young, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 37-38; also Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p. 419.

(for example, unemployment), powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.”²⁰ These forms are not exactly foreign to our Cameroonian experience. Their phenomenology, however, seems to evidence the claim that they are fuelled in the most part by cultural-affiliation criteria. In many cases of shared cultural identity, these injustices do not seem to arise. Without meaning to delve into the intricacies of Young’s position and without suggesting *ipso facto* that they are trivial, I simply intend to examine the foundation and nature of the conflicts that characterise a multicultural polity and show how the Rawlsian model can help to transcend these. Theoretical as the considerations here might appear, I posit them as being a tenable and commendable starting point to a framework for properly transcending the vicissitudes of multiculturalism in Cameroon, and Africa at large.

Rawlsian Public Reason and the Cultural Pluralism²¹

In Africa, the reality of cultural diversity is all the more evident. James Bohman posits that this reality of cultural pluralism presents profound conflicts and disagreements that make this Rawlsian model (or any other standard liberal solutions), without modification, inadequate.²² This is therefore the object of our present study: how can Public Reason, with its claim of neutrality, face the challenge of this social fact – cultural pluralism? To this end we shall greatly avail ourselves of the work of James Bohman for the simple reason that Bohman affords us a uniquely pertinent treatment of the intricacies

²⁰ Arthur, “Multiculturalism,” p.418.

²¹ By Public Reason, John Rawls is referring to the parameters of acceptable discourse and rationale that is to be given within the political or public sphere; a sphere which is a democratic polity characterized by reasonable pluralism. Put differently, Public Reason is the kind of reason, which is legitimate in the thought experiments involved in establishing the correct principles and application of political liberalism. John Rawls, *The Law of the Peoples; with “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,”* London, Harvard University Press, 2001.

²² James Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in C. Girard, & A. Le Goff (éds.), *La démocratie délibérative: Anthologie de textes fondamentaux*, Paris, HERMANN ÉDITEURS, 2010), pp. 247-291. Hereafter the direct references to this work shall be our translation.

of Rawls' notion of public reason vis-à-vis cultural pluralism. It now behoves us to properly present the problem.

Political Liberalism and the Question of Moral Conflict

Bohman's main preoccupation is the position of political liberalism with regard to the question of moral conflict in the context of cultural pluralism.²³ He begins by citing Rawls' claim that political liberalism has its source in the serious consideration of the absolute character of the underlying and unsolvable conflict between comprehensive doctrines and the equal liberty of conscience for all; between moral/religious doctrines and debates on religious tolerance.²⁴ This reality of pluralism, for Rawls and likewise the liberals in general, is the defining characteristic of well-ordered democratic societies and ipso facto, an indispensable element in their political institutions.²⁵

On the other hand, Bohman explains that this social fact – pluralism – is itself susceptible to historical mutation. He puts it like this:

*But this social fact is itself subject to historical change. New forms of cultural diversity have in time produced conflicts and disagreement so profound that even our standard liberal solutions, issuing from religious freedom and tolerance, no longer seem adequate or stable ... if conflicts of interest require arbitration, conflicts of principles, when they are sufficiently profound, obey this type of solution: the sense of the principles of a superior order ... like fairness, is precisely the stakes of the disagreement.*²⁶

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-248; also cf. John Rawls, J., *Libéralisme politique*, Audard, C. (tr.), Paris, PUF, 1995), p. 15.

²⁵ Cf. John Rawls, « The Idea of Public Reason Revisited, » in *Political Liberalism* (expanded edition), (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 440-441; James Bohman, « Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in C. Girard, & A. Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 248.

²⁶ Bohman, « Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard, & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 248.

Of particularly monumental importance in the foregoing quote is the distinction, borrowed from David Hume, between conflicts of interests and conflicts of principles. The wars of religion that inspire the Rawlsian discussion on Public Reason and comprehensive doctrines seem to remain at the level of conflicts of interests. At this level, each group, religion or other institution seeks its own interests and this often puts it in opposition to others who are also after their own interest. This gives the picture of the Hobbesian “state of nature”²⁷ and this is the difficulty Rawls sets out to tackle.

Conversely, this is definitely not the whole story. Under this level lies a more complex and profound conflict which, as Bohman observes, is more insoluble: the conflict of principles. Differences in visions of life, moral values and comprehensive doctrines in general are accentuated and almost made insuperable by cultural belonging – by knowledge repertoire that issues from cultural belonging. This cultural belonging presents a special problem.

The point is this: the Rawlsian system and its likes build on a society where there is a general accord on the democratic procedures that should cater for the normative disagreements; there is a valorisation of privacy/individualism; in fact, there are generally accepted moral presuppositions and political procedures that should deal with these conflicts of interests. Again, it becomes more problematic when the conflict at hand questions these presuppositions themselves. To elucidate this, Bohman gives the example of ‘*la tribu des Sioux*’ which questions the ensemble of the practices and procedures used to solve the conflicts linked to past injustices by means of financial compensation.²⁸

Bohman further explains that political bodies are all the more faced with such conflict situations especially when these concern the political status of cultural minorities.²⁹ Moreover, he contends that the moral conflicts which follow make it impossible for there to be a world without moral dissatisfaction of legal coercion. But this is

²⁷ Hobbes describes this state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London, Penguin, 1981, p. 186.

²⁸ Cf. Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 249.

²⁹ Here he cites Will Kymlicka’s *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

where the puzzle kicks in: “democratic political bodies perish if there is too much dissatisfaction and constrain and too little deliberation and discussion.”³⁰

The foregoing raises questions which according to Bohman are not sufficiently answered in political liberalism: “what role does reason play in such deliberations if the criteria of rationality [of deliberation/public reason] are themselves subject to divergent interpretations? What sort of ‘public bases of justification’ is convenient to such a form of pluralism?”³¹ In pursuance of attempting an answer to these questions and demonstrating that Rawls fails to sufficiently answer them, Bohman discusses the problematic relationship between Public Reason and cultural conflict: he maintains that “profound cultural conflicts render public reason essentially contestable, particularly when moral and epistemological criteria are inextricably intermingled”³² Given that the latter preoccupation is of particular importance to use in the context of our present oeuvre, we shall now turn our attention to it.

Public Reason and Profound Cultural Conflict

*Bohman is acutely aware of the fact that for Rawls, Citizens make use of public reason in mutually explaining the reasons justifying the politics they defend; to determine if a reason is good, it is proper to adopt a public and impartial point of view from which all the reasons, including those of others, are tested so as to determine the ones that all the citizens are supposed to adopt, that is to say the ones that could be defended by the ‘political values of public reason.’*³³

This view seems quite problematic. For one thing, for there to be such a unified point of view, there should be only one Public reason and not many public reasons.³⁴ This is in fact Rawls point: that there

³⁰ Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 249.

³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 249-250.

³² *Ibid*, pp. 252-253.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 261-262.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 262. The issue here is that of the unity or better still the unicity of Public Reason. This is a very fundamental and important question. However lack

is only one public reason whereas there are many non-public reasons.³⁵ In truth, as we shall soon succinctly demonstrate, such a public point of view (one public reason) collapses under the weight of a profound cultural conflict. Then again, the ideals of Public Reason habitually imply a convergence of the opinions or interests through/in deliberation.³⁶ However,

*[T]he formal and procedural criterion of these ideal constrains does not establish the presupposition of such a convergence towards a simple public opinion, and the exigency of impartiality does not demand that all adopt the same point of view in deliberation. Even if individuals and groups construct a public point of view by disregarding their preoccupations and interests, a diversity of criteria of impartiality or of 'impartial individualised preoccupations' is inevitable in pluralist societies.*³⁷

This ushers in the issue of neutrality or impartiality of public reason.³⁸ Rawls maintains that in a pluralist society Public Reason

of time and space prevent us from talking it here. Suffice it to mention nevertheless that it falls within the lust for impartiality and universality that characterises the deontology of Kant, Rawls and Habermas. Bohman would have us believe that this issue is at the heart of the feminist critiques. To that end, he refers us to YOUNG, I., "Impartiality and the civic public" and Benhabib, "The generalised and the concrete other" in S. Benhabib & D. Cornell (eds.), *Feminism as Critique*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987. In like manner, we think it particularly instructive to also cf. C. Gilligan, *Une Si Grand Difference*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986; and Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Sympathy*, New York, Routledge, 2007.

³⁵ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 220.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.* Of course the idea here is that of consensus by crosschecking or better still, overlapping consensus.

³⁷ Bohman, "Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral" in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 262. Here he also makes reference to Thomas Nagel's *Equality and Partiality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 65.

³⁸ William Lund explains that "while we are free to act on particular ethical commitments as members of churches and other voluntary associations, neutrality requires that we eschew debatable appeals to the intrinsic worth of certain ways of life in public debates." (W. Lund, "Egalitarian liberalism and social pathology: a defence of public neutrality" in

<http://www.questia.com/googlescholar.qst?docId=5000548261> {Page consulted on the 8th of May 2011}) He further explicates that "...many egalitarian liberals have argues that public institutions and policies can be legitimate only if their justifications rely on values and beliefs that could not be reasonable rejected by the

does not presuppose any particular conception of the good or any comprehensive doctrine. As a matter of fact, public reason had to remain neutral to these in the sense of precluding any irreconcilable propositions of a religious, moral or in fact non-public nature. In this case, it had to remain purely political; purely formal, purely procedural. We also saw that to ward off the wars of religion this was the only way out. Yet what happens when it comes to the problems posed by cultural pluralism? Can public reason maintain this stance of neutrality?

To answer these questions it is important to bring more clarity to the issue at stake. Cultural pluralism makes a society not only diverse but also divided: “there is no ‘public sphere,’ no single public but instead a plurality: publics of diverse sub-groups, cultures or experts.”³⁹ This engenders dilemmas within groups, which take the “form of conflicts between values of each as citizen and the values of each as member of a cultural group.”⁴⁰

Bohman goes ahead to explain how this conflict could manifest itself. He explains that as citizens one could take as reasonable for all to accept the rights of property whereas as members of a certain culture one could consider such rights as unreasonable with respect to general cultural objectives. Things are made worse by the fact that to be democratic is to take cognisance of both positions.⁴¹

Further elucidation could make the point more accessible. Roger Magyar avers that “[C]atholics seem to reveal a dilemma that arises when there is a conflict between one’s views qua citizen and

individuals who will live under them.” (*Ibid.*) Unfortunately, he goes on, granted that recourse to individual religious or ethical values often fails the test, these liberals reject such justifications. In their stead, they propose that politics be built on “shared principles of justice and right.” Proponents of this view are, as Lund observes, aware that “a neutral state may inspire less awe than a politics (sic) of substantive ideals.” Yet they maintain that their perspective “will yield a fair framework within which citizens may work out more exalted visions of the good in their private lives.” (*Ibid.*) For sure, this is more or less the argumentation that Rawls employs.

³⁹ Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 263.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

one's views qua cultural member.”⁴² Of the examples he cited (abortion, same sex marriage, and physician assisted suicide) he dwells on abortion, one example that Rawls also uses considerably.⁴³

Before getting to Magyar's point, we find it fit to observe that this 'abortion issue' can be particularly instructive. In African countries like Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria abortion has been legalised for certain reasons: to save the mother's life; to preserve the physical health of the mother; and in cases of rape and incest.⁴⁴ As such, the citizens in these countries – doctors as well as other concerned parties – as citizens in any of these cases could politically reasonably and rightly choose the abortion option. However, their choice is complicated by the fact that their cultural heritage is not hospitable to such an option. Godfrey Tangwa explains that the African culture places a very high value on procreation and children that no matter the cause or nature, the “child is accepted and loved unconditionally.”⁴⁵ The worth and respect for human life is so central a value,⁴⁶ especially in this culture that the very idea of abortion is repugnant. In such cases it is not easy to determine the choice that could pass as reasonable and universal: one's view as a citizen or as a member of this cultural group. Let us get back to Roger Magyar. Magyar explains that:

A deeper problem arises in the overlapping consensus per se when the basic principle of the right to life brings about an antinomy. This antinomy arises over abortion. Both the thesis, that the unborn foetus has a right to life, and the antithesis, that the zygote or foetal tissue does not have a right to life

⁴² Roger Magyar, “Justification of Political Liberalism and the Catholic Paradox” in <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Soci/sociMagy.htm> (Page consulted on the 8th of May 2011)

⁴³ Cf. Rawls, *The Law of the Peoples; with The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, pp. 169-171; *Idem*, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture VI, sec. 7.1, pp. 243-244.

⁴⁴ “Summary of Abortion Laws Around the World” deposited on the 15th of April 2002 in <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm> (Page consulted on the 8th of May 2011)

⁴⁵ Godfrey Tangwa, “Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics,” in Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006, pp. 391-392.

⁴⁶ M. M. Agrawal, “Morals and the Value of Human Life” in Emmanuel Eze (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), pp. 146-154.

*due to the right of a woman to control her body, rely on public reason ... on the one hand, public reason declares that it is the woman's right to have an abortion and as a citizen one supports rights, while religious conviction and/or reasonable public intuitive morality informs the self that this is a violation of the right to life ... of the unborn life.*⁴⁷

Aware of this deep conflict – this antinomy of public reason –, Bohman set out to seek the reason why Rawls' Public Reason fails to provide a conclusive solution. For the purposes of clarity and facility in comprehension we shall tackle these reasons alongside the proposed solutions of Bohman.

Bohman's Proposed Solutions

There are basically two reasons for this failure of the Rawlsian notion of public reason to put to rest this deep conflict situation in the context of a well-ordered democratic polity characterised by cultural pluralism: this notion seeks a unicity of public reason, which causes more problems than it solves; and also it claims a certain neutrality that considerably weakens it.

The Unicity of Public Reason

Verily, we have said above that this notion of “unicity of public reason” is too important and fundamental to be treated here, since it requires much space and time, both of which our present endeavour does not sufficiently poses. Nevertheless, without meaning to go back and forth, we presently find it fit to attempt a succinct study of this issue so as to better understand and appreciate Bohman's stance.

His springboard here is the persistent dilemmas of public reason in multicultural democracies. These dilemmas are basically of two forms. Firstly, there is the “communitarian dilemma”. This dilemma opposes unity and plurality: “the unity of the political community in

⁴⁷ Magyar, *op. cit.*

the large sense of the word clearly enters into conflict with the plurality and integrity of smaller cultural groups.”⁴⁸

The second dilemma is the “liberal dilemma”. The issue here is that what is good for all may not necessarily be good for each; “what is good for all the social groups in a neutral sense (political inclusion by the attribution of the same rights and equality for all) is not necessarily good for each group (in which the objectives include the protection of its own minority cultures and identity)”.⁴⁹ Bohman maintains that “Rawls has not adequately resolved the dilemmas created by the ‘irreconcilable values’ that are the starting point of his political liberalism.”⁵⁰

Bohman argues that these dilemmas make evident a positive task of a democratic theory: “it should show that the project of maintaining political deliberation is linked to the resolution of conflicts between plurality and publicity.”⁵¹ The plurality of moral comprehensive doctrines runs into conflict with the use of public reason. This difficulty, Bohman continues is made all the more intractable by the crucial ambiguity in the Kantian and neo-Kantian (Rawls and Habermas) manner of conceiving the use of public reason. They fail to clearly make the distinction between a simple and a plural public reason. And he adds that this distinction is the only way to resolve the dilemmas of public reason.⁵²

⁴⁸ Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 257. Here he gives the example of the lack of recognition of distinct cultural rights which leads to a forced integration and unity at the price of cultural diversity. Justin Cox explicates that debates on the protection of minority cultures, has also taken place within the political culture of individual states. “Those concerned” he continues “with the loss of the distinctiveness of minority cultures have often argued for the granting of multicultural rights. On this view, the individual rights of the minority group members are not sufficiently salient to protect the culture as a whole from the pressure of coexisting with more dominant cultures.” Justin Cox, “The Limits of Toleration: Applying Rawls’ Public Reason to Multicultural Rights” in <http://www.cas.sc.edu/phil/ergon/issue2/ergon002-cox.pdf> (Page consulted on the 8th of May 2011)

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 257-258.

⁵⁰ James Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996, p. 73.

⁵¹ Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁵² *Ibid*.

He further explains that public reason is simple if “it represents a unique norm of public deliberation; in the light of this norm, agents agree on certain decisions, for the same publicly accessible reasons.”⁵³ In clarifying the nature of public reason by distinguishing it from non-public reason, Rawls observes that “[f]irst of all, there are many non-public reasons and but one public reason.”⁵⁴ In this case, public reason is simple because it is one and not many as opposed to non-public reasons which are many.

Conversely, public reason is plural if it does not presuppose any simple norm of the reasonable in the context of deliberations. As such, “agents come to an accord for publicly accessible reasons which are different.”⁵⁵ It is plural because it does not presuppose an impartial single public point of view.⁵⁶

Rawls’ understanding of the unicity of Public Reason seems to be inspired by a certain desire to establish a tool for deliberation in the political sphere which seeks universality and impartiality; a reasoning/reason that all citizens could reasonably adhere to. Evidently, the reality of cultural plurality, as the foregoing has shown, dismisses this idea. Because of cultural pluralism we cannot really talk of a unique public reason.

Cognisant of this, Bohman explains that political unity – which Rawls seeks – does not necessarily imply unicity of public reason. Democratic unity simply implies that “participants get into deliberation with all, with all citizens in the same political sphere.”⁵⁷ Per se, the ideal exercise of plural public reason “is reason exercised in comparison, in which each should be recognised in the mutual interpretations and critiques of the other parties.”⁵⁸

Of course Rawls makes this provision in his discussion on the wide view of public political culture. Here, he explains that reasonable comprehensive doctrines can be used in political debate provided that in due course proper political reasons are presented to

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., p. 220.

⁵⁵ Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-269.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

support them. Nevertheless, the point Bohman seems to be making is that if Rawls was fully aware of the difficulties engendered by cultural pluralism, he would have advocated for a plurality of public reasons and not just one Public Reason. All the same, this modification needs to be complemented because the issue of neutrality is still unattended to.

The Neutrality of Public Reason

Joseph Raz would have us believe that when anti-perfectionism (the doctrine that “the implementation and promotion of ideals of the good life ... are not a legitimate matter for government action”⁵⁹) is understood to require neutrality between competing conceptions of the good it restricts the pursuit of the truly good, valuable, or sound ideals.⁶⁰ Raz’s whole point is that perfectionism (appeal to the ideals of the good life/comprehensive doctrines) does not necessarily offend people’s dignity or treat them without respect, or disregard their autonomy; it can actually be non-coercive and pluralistic.⁶¹

Yet Rawls is vehement that public reason be neutral, be anti-perfectionist. The question is: how can public reason be neutral or purely procedural in the face of cultural plurality? Worth remembering is the fact that here we are dealing with profound conflict situations: situations which question the principles that are supposed to guide deliberations in these democratic polities; conflict situations that question the very criteria of public reason itself.

Maybe if we take a closer look at what “culture” means and implies, the difficulty and possible solution will be clearer. Robert Justin Lipkin defines culture as

[A] systematic response to questions of social meaning in politics, science, ethics, art and ordinary life, thought any given culture need not self-consciously identify the issues in these terms. More generally, “a culture is a human

⁵⁹ Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 110.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 160. Steven Wall also subscribes to this view. Steven Wall, *Liberalism, Perfectionism and Restraint*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

*community ... that is associated with ongoing ways of seeing, doing, and thinking about things” ... Cultures contain paradigms or models – sets of instructions – for dealing with problems of living, acting and judging.*⁶²

As far as one can tell from that foregoing quote, one cannot be neutral to culture. This is because, as Justin Cox explains, “[e]very human being is born into and leads their life within a cultural context, whatever it may be.”⁶³ Culture gives one a background of knowledge that conditions/guides ones approach to all the spheres of life: political, scientific, ethical and religious *inter alia*. It is culture that determines peoples understanding of socio-political practices.

It is in this light that communitarians, in the likes of Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, criticise the portrait of value by liberals. They posit, and we find no reason to disagree with them, that choice is intrinsically bound up in people’s understanding of social practices (bound up with their culture) and also the ensuing assessment of the worth of good internal to those practices.⁶⁴

⁶² R. J. Lipkin, *In Defense of Outlaws: Liberalism and the role of Reasonableness, Public Reason, and Tolerance in Multicultural Constitutionalism*, in http://works.bepress.com/robert_lipkin/17 (Page consulted the 8th of May 2011)

⁶³ Cox, *op. cit.* Here he further explains that cultural neutrality is manifestly an impossibility, since any development of social norms will necessarily privilege one conception of morality over all others.

⁶⁴ Magyar, *op. cit.* Like Rawls, MacIntyre maintains that deliberation is central to the political community. Yet he parts ways with Rawls by maintaining that this cannot merely be procedural, but needs some content – virtue. He avers that contemporary moral world is bedevilled by endless debates; that humans now live in an epistemological inferno – holding befuddled notions, empty opinions, and hollow ideas; that the situation is made insuperable by recourse to procedure without content. The only way out of this shambles is recourse to a certain content – virtues. This is what makes rationality practical. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Edition, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), esp. Chap. 17; *idem*, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, 2nd Printing, Chicago, Open Court Publishing, 1999, pp. 130-144; and for the notion of practical rationality, *idem*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, p. ix; K. Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998); T. CLAYTON, “Political Philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre” in *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, in <http://www.iep.utm.edu/p-macint/> (Page consulted on the 11th of March 2011) It could also be particularly instructive to see Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Paper 2*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Magyar contends that Michael Sandel rightly gives emphasis to the moral primacy of knowledge inclusive of self-discovery. He further explains that choices “presuppose a complicated background of (often tacit) knowledge [culture]. Rawls only mentions this background without considering its full import.”⁶⁵ Actually, the fact that Rawls subscribes to neutrality unmistakably gives the impression that he does not consider the full import of this cultural baggage.

More puzzlingly, Lipkin explains that this liberalist neutrality creates an “artificial” culture, a “civic” culture, which does not have any natural language, any traditional religion, but has few customs and rituals.⁶⁶ From our working definition of culture it is hard to understand how such a culture is possible. However, Lipkin goes on to show that this ‘civic’ culture is a culture in that political liberals tend to interpret most of social life in terms of the liberal perspectives. *Ipsa facto*,

*[L]iberalism is far from neutral; it is not neutral because it incorporates a personal lifestyle to go along with its political conception, although not every political liberal must adopt this style. Also, liberalism fails to be neutral because it embraces a particular view of the self ... in short, liberalism tends to become a super-culture critically examining all, and rejecting some, traditional cultures.*⁶⁷

The foregoing goes to show that Rawls’ claim of neutrality neither seems tenable nor legitimate in the context of cultural pluralism. That notwithstanding, the difficulty we set out to resolve still stands: can public reason itself be neutral/purely procedural in this context?

The issue is this: the knowledge background that culture produces could give rise to profound conflict by questioning the criteria of public reason and thus question the limits of public reason in deliberation.⁶⁸ Cultural/moral diversity and epistemic diversity go

⁶⁵ Magyar, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Lipkin, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 271.

together. Once public reason is questioned at this fundamental level it can hardly survive unless certain major modifications are made.

This difficulty is made intractable by the reality of a plurality of public reasons which seems to suggest that there is no single public bases of justification and that there is a plurality of reasonable and defensible points of view.⁶⁹ Bohman avers that be as it may important to establish the possibility of a “reasonable pluralism” and the limits of public reason, it is however impossible to place the values of public reason beyond all political debate as Rawls does.⁷⁰

Truly, there is need for an accord in this crises situation. Then again, Bohman contends that Rawls (and Habermas) err in taking this need for an accord to mean the need for a simple accord: an accord which “demands that citizens converge, in the long run, on the same reasons, instead of agreeing for different reasons.”⁷¹ While Bohman observes that this stance is praiseworthy especially in its rejection of mere a *modus vivendi*, he proposes that the ideal accord must be a plural accord: an accord that “simply requires a continuous cooperation in public deliberation, even if disagreements persist.”⁷²

Given that deliberation requires more than the ideals of a simple accord – made evident by the reality of cultural plurality – there is need for another form of accord, a more minimal plural accord (a constant cooperation and an offer of public reason); an accord based on a distinctively moral compromise.⁷³

Also worth remembering is the fact that conflicts are profound in the sense that the epistemic and moral factors are so intermingled that no clear basis of judgement exists.⁷⁴ How then will this moral compromise work? This compromise is at the hermeneutical level: since the conflict is at the level of principles, the only way out is to

⁶⁹*Ibid*, pp. 271-272.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 272.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 276. This is why Rawls is vehement that religious toleration or the consensus should be for the right reasons and nit just a *modus vivendi*. Rawls, *The Law of the Peoples; with The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, pp. 149-150.

⁷² Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 276.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 277.

⁷⁴*Ibid*, p. 279.

modify the interpretation of the principles at the bases of one's cultural inclinations. As Bohman puts it:

*In the specifically moral compromise, the parties do not modify the setting so as to come to unanimity, though they could do it in less profound conflicts. They instead modify their conflicting interpretation of the setting, in such a way that each could recognise the moral values and criteria of the other as if taking part in it. The setting is now sufficiently common for each and every one to continue to cooperate and deliberate together.*⁷⁵

However, Bohman warns that this does not mean that this makes the setting one as a simple impartial accord would have it. The accord here stays plural and definitely not neutral. It is not neutral in the sense that the values of the citizens and the conceptions of the good life are mobilised in the setting of public debate.⁷⁶

But this bears much of a muchness to what Rawls himself says: reasonable comprehensive doctrines can be used at any time provided that in due course, proper political reasons are presented to support them; mutual knowledge of one another's comprehensive doctrine is important because it recognises the fact that the roots of democratic citizen's allegiance to their political conceptions lie in their respective comprehensive doctrines – in their culture. This both satisfies the *proviso* and meets the duty of civility.⁷⁷

If truth be told, Rawls gives commendable room for the use of the knowledge baggage from comprehensive doctrines/culture in public debate. His insistence that in due course political reasons be given is an attempt to avoid discussions from becoming “arguments of the deaf”; with everyone seeking only to establish their own point of view. We must remember that it is public justification that he

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 280.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 281. Here again he makes reference to Ronald Dworkin who proposes such a moral compromise in the case of abortion. Dworkin attempts to put into words a setting in which the intrinsic value of human life is recognised in such a way that it should be coherent with the autonomy of women in terms of procreation. For Dworkin both parties could see that their moral reasons are represented, interpreted and evaluated. *Ibid*; also cf. Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia and Individual Freedom*, New York, Knopf, 1993.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

envisages and as such, the goal is to argue from premises that we accept (our cultural/moral baggage) and we think others could reasonably accept (present them in a way that is impartial and accessible to others who have a different and sometimes opposing point of view).⁷⁸ To this extent, we think that Rawls is in order so far. Justin Cox thinks so too when he proposes that “the procedures of public reason, as articulated by John Rawls, ought to be employed to determine the proper limits of toleration for multicultural rights.”⁷⁹

In spite of that, it is reasonable to modify this Rawlsian position so as to further empower it against the difficulties which issue from cultural pluralism as we saw above. To this end, Bohman avows that

*Plural public reason promotes a collective deliberation on conflicts and not on the collective objectives of the particular cultures. Public reason contributes to transform the cultural setting of each culture through mutual critiques and interpretations ... in fact, public reason promotes a critical reflection on the culture proper to each, and the open and pluralist forums inevitably change the beliefs and identities of those who get into it because they incorporate new reasons and justifications of others. This form of deliberation always necessitates the public use of reason of citizens, even a plural use. Moral compromises are supposed to promote this deliberation.*⁸⁰

Suffice it to note that compromise here is taken to mean negotiations and the search for forms of equilibrium between interests, making reciprocal concessions.⁸¹ This is the reason why the hermeneutical approach is valorised. A conflict at the level of principles can only be solved by a re-interpretation of these principles in a way that is both faithful to the spirit of the principles and more inclusive to the various positions at stake.

It is to this end that Bohman postulates that the process will require continual substantial and procedural compromise with respect to public deliberation.⁸² Substantial in the sense of taking

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Cox, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Bohman, “Raison publique et pluralisme culturel. Le libéralisme politique et la question du conflit moral » in Girard & Le Goff (éds.), *op. cit.*, p. 286.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 290.

cognisance of the profound adherence to the knowledge baggage provided by culture and procedural in the sense of remaining faithful to the reasonable principles of democratic polity at large.

A case in point to elucidate this is the issue of voting rights. In this case cultural pluralism should enable us to change the way in which we consider representation so as to maximise the participation of diverse groups in the same political process (public deliberation) and in the public civic sphere; it should also help us to change the way we apprehend the formation of these groups themselves, because the plurality of groups in civil society promote deliberation only if these groups can form and reform themselves in the public sphere, and by so doing, promote the necessary social conditions with respect to overcoming the persistent inequalities of the culturally defined and disadvantaged groups.⁸³ (As far as we know, this tally with the spirit of Rawls' second principle of justice, that inequalities are permissible only if they are to the advantage of the minority or the more disadvantaged group.)

Per se, public reason cannot be neutral: it must be procedural (mostly in the light of Rawls' presentation); but then it must also be substantial/substantive, be more open to the reality of culture. This is the only way, according to Bohman, and we find no reason not to agree with him, that public reason will be able to overcome the profound conflicts discussed above; public reason should not be neutral.

Above and beyond, we are vehement that public reason cannot be neutral. Bohman has insinuated that we adopt a hermeneutical approach. Well, let us push the argument a notch further. The very words "public reason" suggest that this notion cannot be neutral. 'Public' seems to suggest the political dimension, the procedural dimension. All the same, 'reason' suggests the metaphysical dimension, the substantial/substantive dimension. These seem to suggest a certain political use of a metaphysical concept; a public use of reason. Ipso facto, the political procedure enhanced by "public reason" would not be true to itself if it were merely a procedure with no content. It is a procedure that needs some substance (reason).

⁸³ *Ibid*, pp. 289-290.

It is important for us to stress that neither procedure nor substance can stand on its own, much the same as neither the matter nor form of corporeal realities can stand on their own.⁸⁴ Only substance will not be sufficiently open to the specificity of particular situations. Mere procedure will be unable to resolve all the conflicts that arise, especially if these are of a profound nature. For practical purposes therefore, it is more reasonable for the procedural/political to be complemented by the substantial/metaphysical and for the substantial/metaphysical to be actualised and tempered by the procedural/political. They are not rivals. Rather, they are complements. Public reason does not need to be neutral/procedural/political to be effective. This weakens it considerably. It needs to both be procedural and substantial/substantive in order to be stronger and more effective.

Conclusion

Cameroon, for her cultural plurality, can be said to be a great event of the challenges of multiculturalism. It seems very true to observe that ethnic politics in Cameroon leaves much to be desired. The role that cultural diversity plays in Cameroon public policy does not appear positive. Inter-linkages between culture and politics seem bedevilled by an inordinate struggle for dominion and subjugation.

Verily, cultural plurality is a force for good if properly harnessed. When properly harnessed, multiculturalism translates into 'multiculturality' – a mutual enhancement of each culture by the other so as to make the polity in question a veritable beauty in diversity. Yes the Rawlsian idea of Public Reason provides a laudable solution to the deep moral conflict that characterises cultural pluralism. However, the exact way in which this idea could be applied to deal with the culture/culture divide in Cameroon remains a practical task for the policy makers that be. My position is that this 'multiculturality' consciousness would significantly and positively alter public policy.

⁸⁴T. Alvira, *et alii*, *Metaphysics*, L. Supan (tr.), Manila, Sinag-Tala Publishers, Inc., 1991), p. 198; L. De Raeymaeker, *The Philosophy of Being: A Synthesis of Metaphysics*, Ziegelmeyer, E. H. (tr.), New York, B. Herder Book Co., 1954, p. 160; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, I, q. 75, a. 6, Rep.

This positive impact would reflect itself in employment into civil service, public entrances and curricular design. Many as the educational concerns in this area are, and without going into their nitty-gritty, I maintain that the foregoing Rawlsian construct could just be, in its shrewd application, the required panacea.

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Multicultural Education as the Basis for Peace and Good Citizenship in Cameroon

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Abstract

Cameroon has been described as Africa in miniature. This description refers to multi-ethnic groups, diverse cultures, values, languages, religious, resources, seasons and all that is African. In this context, lack of tolerance and respect of the other constitute the basis for conflict, war and differences. The current bicultural system founded on the British and French colonial heritage. This paper sets out to argue that multiculturalism offers a better educational alternative for a pluralistic society like Cameroon. It promotes diversity of values, tolerance, equity and encourages recognition of the other. Education is the wheel on which every society moves. Therefore, an educational alternative that promotes values of dialogue and cooperation ensures peace and good citizenship in a country. This is the justification given for a multicultural educational alternative for development in Cameroon.

Introduction

*Multiculturalism is (...) the only way to reduce the misunderstanding across subcultures, the only way to build bridges of loyalty across ethnicities that have so often divided us. Multiculturalism of this sort pluralism, to use an older word- is a way of making sure we care enough about people across ethnic divides to keep those ethnic divides from destroying us.*¹

Cameroon is often described as Africa in miniature. This description includes cultural diversity amongst other aspects. There

¹ Appiah, K. A. "Culture, Subculture, Multiculturalism: Educational Options" in *Foundational Perspectives in Education*, (ed.), E. M. Durate and S. Smith, New York, Longman, 2000, p. 291.

is an academic turn in Cameroon referred to as “academic exodus.”² This is the mass movement of students from one sub-system of education to another. In the Cameroonian context, it is the movement of students from the French sub-system of education to the English sub-system. Within these two sub-systems there are more than two hundred and thirty ethnic groups. This country is an ethnically diverse nation.³ In most schools around, like the case in the capital city Yaoundé, Douala and other regions like Bamenda, Bafoussam, Garoua, the student population portrays the place of multi-ethnicity in Cameroonian institutions, ranging from basic education to higher education. The variation amongst students is not limited to ethnic backgrounds, but extends to their interests including; aptitudes, needs, experiences, desires, and wills.⁴ Multi-ethnicity in Cameroon already requests multicultural education. Apart from a plurality of ethnic groups in Cameroon, there are two sub-systems of education based on the two cultures of colonial heritage. Owing to this cultural diversity, a multicultural education approach is not simply an option but a thought provoking need deserving reflection in the Cameroonian context. This paper aims at investigating whether multicultural education affords a plausible educational alternative for a multi-ethnic society like Cameroon. Here, it is the question of inquiring whether this educational perspective enhances quality education and equity within the Cameroonian politics of unity and national integration. Aristotle establishes a necessary link between politics and education. He argues that education is the responsibility of the State. The type of education given to the citizens of any society has to enhance and sustain the political objectives of the regime in place.⁵ As a country that promotes unity and national integration of all citizens, the Cameroonian state has to choose an educational objective that fosters peace and good citizenship.

² Ngalim, B. V., *Lack of Harmonisation in the Curricular of Cameroon: Causes in Centre and Northwest Regions*, Saarbrücken, Scholars' Press, 2014, p.36.

³ Edmonston, B., “Composition of the Population,” in *Encyclopedia of the US Census*, (ed.), M. J. Anderson, Washington, DC. Urban Institute Press, 2000, p. 45.

⁴ Dewey, J. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, New York, Free Paper Press, 1966, p. 80.

⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1310a13.

Conceptual Clarification

*Multiculturalism is a reform movement designed to restructure educational institutions so that all students, including white, male and middleclass students, will acquire the knowledge skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world [...]. Multicultural education [...] is not an ethnic or gender specific movement, but a movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring and active citizens [...].*⁶

James Banks defines multiculturalism as an educational alternative and strategy, which recognises and attempts to reform the inequalities that exist in educational theory and practice. Parker explains that the central purpose of multicultural education is “*to improve race relations and to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social and civic action that will make our nation more democratic and just*”.⁷ In the context of this paper, multicultural education is a form of democratic citizenship education that recognizes plurality of our society and attempts to bring historically marginalized groups to the forefront of public education in order to develop active democratic citizens.⁸ Multicultural education fosters citizenship education, and attempts to connect the concepts of “*Pluribus ad Unum* (unity in diversity) to create inclusive, equitable and just societies. Multicultural education is not just for individuals that characterize diverse backgrounds. However, it is citizenship education for everyone.

Talking of citizenship, we define a citizen as a member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership.⁹ Aristotle defines a citizen as “*a person who shares in the holding of office*”.¹⁰ Active participation in process deliberation and

⁶ Banks, J. A., *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2002, p.5.

⁷ Parker, P., *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*, New York, Teachers' College, 2003, p.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹ W. Kymlicka., *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 23.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1275a8.

decision making ensures that individuals are citizens not subjects.¹¹ In the context of our study, citizens refer to different patriotic individuals who contribute to nation building. Thus, citizenship refers to the entitlements due to persons who employ their potentials for the growth of the country. Peace is a state of tranquillity, order and harmony towards justice and happiness. From a Platonic perspective, peace in the individual reflects peace in the State. Individuals who enjoy the state of peace are just and happy. These individuals constitute a society of just and happy persons.¹² To define peace as the absence of war is to be susceptible to the fallacies of incongruous and negative definitions. Such a definition is narrow as it fails to include the necessary aspects of peace, like the presence of justice. A culture of peace consists in values, habits or patterns of behaviour that reflect and favour a life of sharing and exchanges in freedom, democracy, justice, human rights and the spirit of tolerance. These attitudes prevent conflict and aim at resolving problems through dialogue and negotiation¹³. Good education promotes democratic citizenship by enforcing peace and unity.

In *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, Hannah Arendt prescribes a conservative character of education. Within this framework, she argues that education preserves the cultural patrimony of a people. Education refers to the initiation of the younger generation to the cultural values of society. Education plays the role of transmitting the cultural heritage from one generation to another.¹⁴ However, cultural diversity stands as a threat to the integration of diverse cultural patrimonies in the educational system. Cameroon is a multi-ethnic society with more than 280 ethnic groups having cultural differences. This society is characterized by many cultures, several traditions, several systems of understanding the world and man, good and evil, justice and injustice. Owing to this background, can the Cameroonian educational system accommodate multiculturalism without letting education degenerate to a clash of

¹¹ Kymlicka, 1995, p. 25.

¹² Plato, *The Republic*, V, iv, 435a – 449a.

¹³ Fonkoua, et al. (eds.), *Elements d'Education a la morale et a la Citoyennete au Cameroun*, Rocare Cameroun, editions terroirs, 2007, p. 253.

¹⁴ H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, New York, The Viking Press, p.189.

cultures, the war of the gods,¹⁵ the clash of civilizations? Is education for peace and good citizenship possible in a multi-ethnic background? Is multiculturalism a threat to schools and social cohesion of a country perceived as Africa in miniature?

This paper takes the perspective of cultural compatibility.¹⁶ Education is more effective when compatible with cultural patterns. This paper argues that probably multiculturalism promises a better approach to the educational objectives of Cameroon. The argument to be advanced is that with multicultural education values like tolerance, cultural diversity and preservation of cultural identity, acceptance, equity, justice and inclusion, multi-ethnicity is no longer an impediment to the politics of unity and national integration. It is rather a source of cultural diversity and plurality, which may enhance dialogue, peace and good citizenship in Cameroon.

Objectives of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education can take many forms. Some schools of thought in multicultural education maintain that this form of education should mainly focus on the concept of culture and problems arising from the conflict of cultures. For this school, students should examine the dialectic between home culture versus school culture.¹⁷ Also, there is a need to look into the conflict between the cultures of the powerful and the powerless, an unequal treatment afforded certain groups because of regional, linguistic, cultural, gender and ethnic differences.¹⁸

On the other hand, some scholars observe that multiculturalism puts less emphasis on culture and simply promotes change in the society. This educational approach is presented as an agent of change because its method criticizes and recommends reforms in the society. The reforms are put in place to improve on the political and moral

¹⁵ Mbonda, E. M., "Education et Multiculturalisme" in G. Pallante, (ed.), *Enseignement et Culture*, Yaounde, PUCAC, 2010, pp. 35-54.

¹⁶ Nyerere, J. K., *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 21.

¹⁷ Dewey, J., 1966, p. 56.

¹⁸ Sleeter, C. E. & Grant, C. A., *Making Choices for Multicultural Education: Five Approaches to Race, Class and Gender*, (2nd ed.), New York, Merrill, 1993, p. 31.

aspects so as to assist working class and students from minority cultural backgrounds to attain socio-economic advancement.¹⁹

Glazer argues that some groups have been denied appropriate recognition. Multiculturalism sets out to eradicate stereotypes and discrimination, innovating according to the needs of the learners, effect change in the society beyond the school. Multiculturalism is the price that Cameroon has to pay for its inability or unwillingness to incorporate into its society some cultures, regions, ethnic groups, tribes in the same way and to the same degree it has incorporated other groups.²⁰ At this juncture, it must be maintained that multiculturalism is a complex field. It has multiple definitions and varied teaching methods portraying diverse definitions. Even though there are many approaches to multicultural instruction in schools, this paper draws its inspiration from James Banks multicultural theory, John Dewey's theory of democratic education, Kwame Nkrumah's philosophical consciencism and Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa*.

The *a Contrario* Characterization of Multicultural Education

The *a contrario* method explains the concept of multicultural education by saying what it is not.²¹ This philosophical approach of clarifying concepts is employed in this context to minimize misconceptions and fallacies in the understanding of multicultural education.

First, multicultural education is not anti-euro-centric education. Euro-centric education refers to a learning approach that valorises western educational values. This is expressed in the construction of the curriculum. Major aspects include the contents of the subject matter, the methods of teaching and the organization of the learning environment to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. One misconception of multicultural education is the thesis that it rejects euro-centric or western values of education from the African or

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁰ Glazer, N., *We are All Multiculturalists Now*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 147.

²¹ . Reboul, O., *La Philosophie de L'education*, Paris, Presse Universitaire de France, 1989, p. 5.

Asian contexts. The objective of multiculturalism is not to claim that western values are wrong or evil. Far from rejecting European cultural values, multicultural educational alternative advocates for one simple educational truth. It underlines the fact that the spirit of tolerance cannot grow without respect and recognition of the values of the learners and their points of view.²² In Cameroonian educational context, multiculturalism advocates the recognition of cultural diversity and the acceptance of one another's culture. Here, it is the question of exploring the diversity of both indigenous and colonial cultures in order to incorporate salutary values in the school curriculum. This approach is not synonymous to a rejection of euro-centric values. In philosophical consciencism, Nkrumah espouses a critical consumption of both indigenous and colonial values for the political and socio-economic development of Africa. This advocacy requests the spirit of openness to others. It is of capital importance to incorporate values that are relevant to the needs of the people. This is because "the goat does not eat all the grass it sees".²³ The implication of multicultural education alternative therefore, requires learning the histories and literature that contribute to the tapestry of Cameroonian life. Cameroonian students require knowledge from all cultures irrespective of whether they are indigenous or colonial. These two dimensions constitute values that have fashioned Cameroon into a single nation. For instance, pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial histories are important aspects of the curricula of the two sub-systems of education in Cameroon.²⁴ It is through the preservation of these values that young Cameroonians will be educated into the already existing world²⁵. Therefore, multiculturalism does not deny euro-centric or colonial values but it simply promotes recognition and respect for indigenous values in the process of education.

²² Dewey, J., 1966, p. 56; Gates, H. L., (Jr.), *Loose Canons: Notes on the Cultural Wars*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. xv.

²³ Nkrumah, K., *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization*, New York, Paperback edition, 1970, p. 81.

²⁴ King, J. E. "Diaspora Literacy and Consciousness in the Struggle against Miseducation in the Black Community" in *Journal of Negro Education*, (1992), 61(3), pp. 317-40.

²⁵ Arendt, H., *La crise de la culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 73.

Second, multiculturalism is not a counter-reaction to the traditional curriculum. The traditional curriculum refers to educational values that maintain the rigid and mechanical woodenness in the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student.²⁶ It is a top-down approach to knowledge of Literature, Music and History. The objective of multicultural education is not to repudiate this form of education. Multicultural education simply emphasizes academic freedom and the need to understand the interests of the learners.²⁷ Multiculturalism recognizes the values of the traditional method of schooling. However, it takes issue with rigid and fixed methods of learning. It recommends the need to challenge the status quo and adapt the teaching-learning transaction to the interests of the learners.²⁸ For multicultural education alternative, rigid and fixed methods of learning are counter-productive for establishing socially-flexible individuals for full integration into the community.²⁹ With emphasis on the interests of the learners in education, multiculturalism summons us to fairness in the provision of educational experiences. Narrow-mindedness through regional biases, tribalism and sexism compromises the socio-economic and political growth of Cameroon.

Owing to the above objective of multiculturalism, the use of textbooks and educational facilities that project some characters to the relative neglect of others is unacceptable. For example, books in engineering and subjects like Physics projecting masculinity either in pictures or characters betray sexual bias in the assumption of social roles. When men are displayed in workshops as engineers and women presented as cooks in the kitchen portray societal stereotypes to jobs and professions. Multiculturalism challenges these tendencies arising from patriarchal cultures by requesting the projection of all heroes irrespective of sex, region, tribe and language. Tribal, linguistic, sexual and regional stereotypes to academic success are narrow perceptions of reality. Multiculturalism advocates equality but

²⁶ Dewey, J., 1966, p. 170.

²⁷ . *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁸ .*Ibid.*, 172.

²⁹ . Banks, J. A., "On Multicultural Education Development, Dimensions and Challenges" in *Phi Delta Kappa*, 75(1), September 1993.

underlines differences in capacities and aptitudes. Its objective proposes a place for everyone to participate in the management of the affairs of life in accordance to one's interests³⁰. Therefore, its mission is not an outright denial of the traditional curriculum, but complementing it with progressive curriculum that respects the interests of learners.

Third, Multiculturalism is not a projection of *culturalism*. *Culturalism* refers to the tendency to project values of one's culture without a critical consideration of its application in context. The most effective way to teach in a multicultural approach is to render the curriculum relevant to the needs, desires, experiences and aptitudes of learners. The curriculum is more meaningful when students find characters like themselves in books they read. Learning is more interesting when the needs, preferences, experiences and desires of the learners are represented in the subject matter and methods. Exclusion of any group deliberately or unwillingly passes this message: "*Read our faces [...] we don't read ourselves in the books, we don't hear our voices in the lectures*".³¹ A fair representation of ethnic cultural values in the curriculum is the benefit of multiculturalism. Cultural differences, tolerance, respect for different traditions and perspectives are hallmarks of multiculturalism.

Typologies of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education cannot be all things for all people. There are efforts of classifying the various educational values and strategies under the genus of multiculturalism in order to establish a "typology". A typology is important because it is a useful framework for brainstorming issues and clarifying conceptions of multicultural education. James Banks, Sleeter and Grant have sought ways of developing two useful typologies.³² This paper will introduce the

³⁰ . Dewey, J., 1966, p. 91.

³¹ Harvard Educational Review, "Ethnicity and Education Forum: What Difference Does Difference Make?" *Harvard Educational Review*, 1997, 67 (2), pp. 169-187.

³² Banks, J. A. "Multicultural Education, Historical Development Dimension and Practice" in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, Banks, J. (ed.), San Francisco, Cherry McGee Banks, CA: Jossy- Bass, 2004, p. 35.

third typology which approaches multicultural education from the point of view of implementation.

The first typology is a content-oriented program. This refers to educational values that include different cultural groups in the curriculum and educational materials. The objective of this approach is to increase the students' knowledge about these groups. In the Cameroonian context, there is a need for the celebration of cultural heroes and holidays within the school year. Cameroonian schools need to benefit from the numerous cultural materials and themes in the curriculum. Banks recommends three goals to this effect;

- There is a need to develop a multicultural content throughout the disciplines. In this case, the cultures around should furnish sources and information for effectively teaching academic disciplines.

- It is also important to incorporate a variety of different points of view and perspectives in the curriculum. Exchanges and sharing amongst different cultures reveal how different people understand and interpret particular phenomena.³³

- We have to transform the canon by introducing a new paradigm for the curriculum. New and alternative ways of teaching the same material in the same discipline render the method more interesting and appealing. This refers to critical teaching which obliges the teacher to always ponder on the previous lessons in order to adapt new strategies to improve on his teaching in the subsequent lessons. Another new alternative in this case could be the creation of single-gender or group classrooms to meet the needs of a particular sex or ethnic group.³⁴ Therefore, single-group studies are possible within this framework.

The second typology is a student-oriented program. This refers to learning values that are designed to meet the academic needs of carefully defined groups of students, most often minority students. This approach is undertaken in order to increase the academic achievement of this group. The content of the curriculum may not be changed. It is rather adapted to the interests of the learners. This

³³Banks, J. A., 2004, p. 37; Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. *Making Choices for Multicultural Education: Five Approaches to Race, Class and Gender*, (2nd ed.), New York, Merrill, 1993, p. 67.

³⁴*Ibid.*

adaptation is possible when further lessons and catch-up classes are organized for students who do not perform well in some areas of studies.³⁵ A typical example is the provision of language programs to build the linguistic capacity of students having difficulties in language. Also, a special maths and science programs for slow learners help each and every student to learn according to his/her aptitude.³⁶

The third typology is a socially-oriented program. This typology refers to the process of reforming the school by improving on the political and cultural contexts of schooling. This program is meant to increase ethnic tolerance in order to do away with prejudices. Banks argues for a desegregation of schools and systems of education. In this case, multicultural education provides the necessity for cultural dialogue and interaction within the school circle.³⁷ In the Cameroonian educational context, this objective is imperative if education has to provide good citizens for a Cameroonian society. There is a need to desegregate the Cameroonian education sub-systems and schools by encouraging cultural interaction, cooperative learning and exchanges amongst teachers from the two sub-systems of education. It does not suffice to make untested and unverified declarations about the two sub-systems of education in Cameroon. The simple truth to learn from multiculturalism in this case is that there is no superior culture.³⁸ No sub-system is superior or inferior to the other. It merely requires a critical disposition where cooperative learning and exchanges of values are possible. This is the approach to foster human relations in all forms. This may reduce ethnic and regional tensions within the classroom. A democratic classroom atmosphere is the product of socially-oriented programs. This may lead to pluralism and cultural equity in schools.

In a nutshell, there are three typologies of multicultural education. These typologies are not exclusive to one another but the third is a blend of the first and the second. The socially-oriented program simply improves on the content and student-oriented programs to enhance, social dialogue, critical thinking skills,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.69.

³⁶ Dewey, J. 1966, p. 84.

³⁷ Banks, J. A., 2004, p. 42.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

cooperative learning and exchanges amongst students. These values emphasize the importance of tolerance and recognition as values of multicultural education.

Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Once more, Banks highlights five dimensions of developing a school curriculum in a multicultural context. Firstly, he proposes content integration. Here, the use of a variety of information from diverse cultural backgrounds and groups is imperative. This strategy aims at conveying key concepts, principles, generalisations and theories in a subject area by the teacher. This approach emphasizes the importance of learning about one's own culture and at the same time learning about the cultural values of others. It broadens the scope of the curriculum and provides the possibility of sharing in a classroom atmosphere. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds exchange values and this creates an enabling environment for dialogue amongst cultures.³⁹ The growth of the spirit of tolerance, recognition and acceptance of the other are different results of this democratic process of learning.

Secondly, knowledge construction with a multicultural alternative helps the teacher guide the students towards creative learning. Banks thinks that a variety of cultural and social class groups influence knowledge. Multicultural education promotes equity pedagogy where the teacher is not the dictator of knowledge. The democratic process in a multicultural classroom entails sharing and dialogue in the construction of knowledge. Though the teacher is the older generation that has to introduce the students (the younger generation) into the world, he is not the completion point of knowledge. He simply facilitates the learning activities by letting every student have a voice in the construction of knowledge.⁴⁰ The merit of this approach is the problem-solving method. Brainstorming different problems in a classroom permits the possibility of learning from one another. This is an atmosphere for a creative classroom. In the knowledge construction process, teachers help students to

³⁹ Banks, J. A., 2004, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

understand how knowledge is constructed as part of a cultural process.

Thirdly, the reduction of prejudices focuses on students' attitudes towards persons from other cultures and how they can be modified. This dimension recommends the use of materials and methods to modify students' discriminatory attitudes. With the possibility of exchanging values from different cultures students are able to know about others. This exposes the differences in cultural perceptions and the different interpretations of the world, man, good and evil. The Teaching of concepts like tribalism, witchcraft and force being in African Philosophy gives one a critical disposition and a better appreciation of values from other cultural backgrounds. To develop a critical disposition and open-mindedness in students, the teacher has to ensure the study of the culture of the students and those of others.⁴¹ This enhances an understanding of other cultures and limits the prejudices borne against others.

Fourthly, with equity pedagogy, teachers use a variety of teaching styles consistent with learning styles of cultural and ethnic groups.⁴² This approach raises the question of the fixity of method in a pedagogic process. Discussing on method, Dewey rejects prescriptions of teaching methods.⁴³ His argument goes that every pedagogic process is unique because it is established on the basis of the needs, aptitudes, experiences, desires and interests of learners. Considering this approach in education, the first question to be asked is; what are the learning methods in the Cameroonian context? This question brings forth the importance of the African traditional pedagogy. What are the different modes of learning in the different cultural backgrounds? Do the present school systems employ these methods to ensure appropriate acquisition of knowledge? What about learning by observation, learning by doing and orality which is at the centre of communication in Africa? These questions reveal a lacuna in the teaching-learning transaction in our systems, thereby requesting the urgency of multicultural alternative education.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴² Banks, J. A., 2004, p. 5.

⁴³ Dewey, J., 1966, p. 173.

Lastly, empowering school culture entails restructuring and reorganising the culture of schools to include and empower different racial, ethnic, language and social class groups.⁴⁴ What Banks emphasizes here is that the school culture has to empower students from diverse cultures, ethnic as well as regions. To empower a student refers to the enhancement of that students' potential in order to ensure his/her full integration into the society. Prior to Banks, Jean-Jacques Rousseau stressed the need of education to develop each and every student's potential⁴⁵. However, Rousseau limited it to the development of the nature and desires of the learner without referring to his integration into the community. Dewey perpetuated the need to educate the learner according to his/her interests but emphasized his/her full integration into life in the community. With Banks, the school curriculum is student-centred. However, it is also social because it takes into consideration the growth of the child towards dialogue with others and a harmonious life in the community.

The five dimensions above are integral to fostering multicultural education and democratic theories of equality in schools. These dimensions focus on the curricular and pedagogic approaches to public education. What are the pedagogic techniques, strategies and approaches required by teachers to facilitate learning through multicultural education? How can multicultural education serve as an alternative and strategy in creating culturally responsive classrooms through curricular, pedagogic and classroom reforms? In order to answer these questions, multicultural education must be understood as a progressive educational approach that transforms, criticizes and addresses inequalities, failings and discriminatory practices in school systems. In a multicultural context, schools are presented as democratic institutions necessary for societal change and the elimination of oppression and injustice in society. It affirms pluralism, that is, ethnic, linguistic diversity, tribal and regional differences that students, their communities and schools represent.

⁴⁴ Banks, J. A., 2004, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁵ Rousseau, J-J. *Emile*, (tr.), Barbara, F., New York, Dutton, 1938, p. 5.

Challenges to Multicultural Education Alternative

The second part of this paper aims at examining the critical reactions to multicultural education by different schools of thoughts. These criticisms have been articulated in five main points. The first main charge levelled against multicultural education alternative is from the perspective of the cosmopolitan view of culture. The cosmopolitan perception of culture holds that cultures are not distinct entities or self-contained wholes.⁴⁶ Each and every culture is a sub-system within a system. According to the cosmopolitan argument, the different ethnic cultures have long interacted and influenced one another through wars, imperialism, trade and migration. People in different parts of the world as well as Cameroon live within cultures that are already cosmopolitan. Cultural diffusion has led to what can be described as cultural hybridity. Jeremy Waldron observes that the world in which we live is characterized by technology and trade, economic, religious and political imperialism, mass migration and dispersion of cultural influences.⁴⁷ The implication of what he says is that any educational alternative that narrows the learning processes to a particular culture is superfluous. He recommends learning from a variety of cultural sources. This is the basis of his rejection of multiculturalism.

Responses to Waldron's preoccupations are twofold. Firstly, the arguments given by Will Kymlicka and secondly, the misconception of multiculturalism as expressed by the arguments of Waldron. Kymlicka acknowledges the fact that cultures overlap and interact⁴⁸. He therefore, thinks that special protections for minority cultural groups discussed above are binding, even in the face of a more cosmopolitan view of cultures. The *raison d'être* of group differentiated rights is to empower members of minority groups to continue their distinctive practices if they wish to. In addition,

⁴⁶ Waldron, J., "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 100.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁸ Kymlicka, W., *Multicultural Citizenship: A liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 103.

Waldron's perception of multiculturalism is narrow and susceptible to the strawman and definist fallacies.

By the strawman fallacy, one misrepresents a point of view in order to conveniently dismiss it.⁴⁹ The definist fallacy refers to the provision of a wrong definition thus making it easy to portray its weaknesses.⁵⁰ These two misleading arguments that are apparently convincing are discernible in Waldron's conception of multiculturalism. In this regard, it is important to underline the fact that the multicultural education alternative emphasizes dialogues of cultures and sharing of values. This approach is antithetical to the conception that multicultural education is limited to learning about a particular culture. The sharing of ideas in a multicultural classroom enhances the spirit of tolerance, cooperation, recognition and acceptance of other students. This is the objective of multicultural education. For this reason, it is an educational objective that easily promotes values of peace and good citizenship in the society.

The second critique against multicultural education is that there are no group rights. This position emphasises that only individual rights exist. Here, one finds a dialectic of interests between the rights of the individual and that of the community. For Kukathas, the state transgresses its role of civility when it accords special protections and rights to cultural groups. The impending risk identified is the compromise of individual rights to associations. In this context, Kukathas recommends a "politics of indifference" to minority groups rather than cultural integration.⁵¹ What is the problem with group rights? For Kukathas, the state has little or no authority to interfere in the affairs of groups that practise internal discrimination against its members. He thinks that the abuse of vulnerable members of the group is possible without a corresponding authority to salvage the situation. The examples of the transgressions of rights include communities that bring up children unschooled and illiterate, those that enforce arranged marriages and those that deny medical care to

⁴⁹ Copi, I., *Introduction to Logic*, North Carolina, Prentice Hall, 1998, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Hurley, P., *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, North Carolina, Thomson Learning, 2000, p. 6.

⁵¹ Kukathas, C., "Are there Any Cultural Rights?" *Political Theory*, 1995, 20, pp. 105-139.

their members including children. These violations also extend to communities that inflict cruel and “unusual punishment”.⁵² The above critical charge is binding because it undermines the possibility of multiculturalism serving as a means to peace and good citizenship in the country. However, it must be noted that abuse does not take away use. The merits of multicultural education remain even if the granting of special protections and group rights violate individual rights. The urgency to ensure harmonious living conditions in a society cannot compromise the rights of the individuals in the society. Drawing inspiration from Plato’s conception of the necessary link between the individual soul and the state, it is relevant to think that happy, peace loving and virtuous individuals make up a happy, peace loving and a virtuous society. On the other hand, the protection of group rights in the context where individual rights are violated is a contradiction. Consequently, the latter situation cannot be a source of peace and good citizenship in a society. This critique opens other perspectives necessary for laying down the conditions of establishing multicultural education alternative. Such conditions establish a synthesis between the protection of group rights and individual rights. The individuals make up the group. If the rights of the individuals are protected, then those of the group are protected. The reverse of this rule is unacceptable.

The third charge is that multiculturalism risks diverting attention from the “politics of redistribution” to the “politics of recognition”.⁵³ While the “politics of recognition” challenges inequalities in the status of people in society the “politics of redistribution” challenges economic inequality and exploitation of the members in the society. The implication of this critique is that multicultural education focuses on cultural injustice in the curriculum to the relative neglect of economic injustice in the lives of the learners.

An answer to this puzzle has to emphasize that both recognition and redistribution are important dimensions in the pursuit of equality for minority groups. In order to achieve a greater equality across lines of ethnicity, tribalism, religion, sexuality, class and other forms of

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Fraser, N., & A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-philosophical Exchange*, London: Verso, 2003, p. 67.

marginalization, the politics of redistribution and recognition cannot be separated. These two aspects address material disadvantages and marginalized identities and statuses. The Marxist classical example of dialectical materialism can best illustrate this point. The conflict between the proletariats and the bourgeoisie is not limited to one of the aspects but addresses both status and economic exploitation in the society. It is the economic condition of the person that determines his class in society. The exploitation of the proletariats by the bourgeoisie is condemned by Marx when he summons the proletariats to embark on a revolution in order to establish a classless society. What is interesting to note is that the Marxist dialectical materialism does not separate the politics of redistribution and recognition. It is rather the redistribution of the resources that determines the recognition of people in the society.⁵⁴ From the Marxist perspective, the critical charge of diverting attention by multiculturalism is untenable. This separation is artificial and does not fall within the interest of multicultural education. In any attempt to ensure equity, multicultural education calls for equal access privileges for all persons. These privileges are not limited to recognition and acceptance but extend to the rights to ownership of property, good jobs, fair salaries and other economic benefits.

The fourth charge against multiculturalism is that its protection of the rights of minority groups comes at the price of reinforcing oppression of vulnerable members of those groups. Green has described this problem as the problem of “internal minorities” or minorities within minorities.⁵⁵ The argument is that group-based protections can lead to inequalities within minority groups. That is, in an attempt to protect minority groups from oppression, it becomes plausible that more powerful members of those minority groups are able to undermine the basic liberties and opportunities of vulnerable members. Examples of vulnerable sub-groups within minority groups include religious dissenters, sexual minorities, women and children.

⁵⁴ Marx, K., *Capital, The Process of Capitalist Production*, New York, International Publishers, 1968, p. 527.

⁵⁵ Green, L., “Internal Minorities and Their Rights,” in *Group Rights*, J. Baker (ed.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994, pp. 101–117.

Also, some of the oppressive norms and practices revolve around issues of gender and sexuality. Many feminist critics have highlighted the dialectic between multiculturalism and feminism.⁵⁶ This critique refers to the extension of special protections and accommodations to patriarchal cultural communities. This is seen as an indirect accomplice or reinforcement to gender inequality within these communities. Popular examples today include conflicts over polygamy, arranged marriages, the ban on headscarves like in France, “cultural defences” in criminal law, accommodating religious law or customary law within the dominant legal system and self-government rights to indigenous people who deny equality to women in certain respects.⁵⁷

With these charges against multiculturalism, Kymlicka provides a response to the dialectic of multiculturalism and feminism. For him, both schools of thought envisage a more inclusive conception of justice. Multiculturalism like feminism has concern for inequalities against women and go further to challenge the traditional liberal theory which holds that equality requires identical treatment. We are born equal but we are not the same. The assurance of equity does not entail identical treatment of all persons. Persons differ in aptitude, desires, experiences, needs and interests. A multicultural curriculum has to be one that is adapted to the interests of the people within a particular period of time.⁵⁸ Kymlicka proposes two kinds of group rights in an attempt to resolve the “internal minority” concern. These include; “external protections”- which are rights that a minority group claims against non-members in order to reduce vulnerability to economic and political power of the larger society, and “internal protections”- which are rights that a minority group claims against its

⁵⁶ Okin, S., “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* J. Cohen, M. Howard, and M.C. Nussbaum (eds.), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 43; Shachar, A., “On Citizenship and Multicultural Vulnerability,” *Political Theory*, 2000, 28: pp. 64–89.

⁵⁷ Phillips, A., *Multiculturalism without Culture*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 36.

⁵⁸ Dewey, J., 1966, p. 80.

own members. The Liberal theory of minority rights cannot admit the latter.⁵⁹

However, “external protections” to minority groups at times come at the expense of internal restrictions. This is the case when the right to self-government is accorded to a group that violates the rights of its members like limiting freedom of conscience and upholding sexually discriminatory rules. This observation complicates the process of resolving the problem of “internal minorities” within the framework of the liberal theory of minority rights.⁶⁰ A better alternative is the approach of the democratic theory. With the democratic deliberation opinions of affected parties are sanctioned in order to determine the contested practice. Benhabib and Deveaux think that from the voices of the affected parties with special attention given to voice of women at the centre of gendered cultural conflicts, deliberation may clarify the interests at stake thus enhancing the legitimacy of responses of cultural conflicts. Deliberation also gives opportunities for minority group members to expose instances of cross cultural hypocrisy. This determines whether the struggles for gender equality are incomplete and on-going⁶¹. At this juncture, the justification for a democratic deliberation rather than a liberal one is that gender subordination is an ambiguous situation. There is a need to intervene into minority cultural groups to draw from the voices of minority women. This will serve the interest of responding to their needs, desires and experiences within the context of multicultural education.

The last charge is that multicultural education is not relevant to the African milieu because Africa is not a multi-racial continent. This educational alternative is only considered acceptable in Europe and America where one can talk of society with many races. This view is incongruous because it narrows the interests of multicultural

⁵⁹ Kymlicka, W., 1995, 35-44, Kymlicka, W., “Liberal Complacencies,” in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* J. Cohen and M. Howard, and M.C. Nussbaum (eds.), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 31.

⁶⁰ Kirp, D. L. “Textbooks and Tribalism in California” in *Public Interest*, 1991. 104, pp. 20-36.

⁶¹ Benhabib, S., *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 67; Deveaux, M., *Gender and Justice in Multicultural Liberal States*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2006, p. 45.

education to the resolution of racial crises. This charge is unacceptable. Though one cannot necessarily generalize educational values from different contexts, it is acceptable to apply the principles according to the demands of the environment in question. It is therefore relevant to issues of equity, ethnicity and tribalism in Africa.

Perspectives of Multiculturalism for Education in Cameroon

There are challenges and merits to the Cameroonian educational system arising from a multicultural educational alternative. These challenges and perspectives include: the recognition of cultural pluralism in the construction of the school curriculum, inclusive education, exchange of cultural values, education to good citizenship, conducive school climate and cultural tolerance in schools.

In the first place, multiculturalism is recognition of pluralism. Multiculturalists agree that people construct knowledge from slightly different perspectives. People interpret events based on personal and academic experiences and other interpretative lenses through which they view the world. Everyone develops separate frames of reference and different perspectives for interpreting the social and political world. No one frame is more 'true' than another and all deserved to be heard and understood. Multiculturalism is an attempt to incorporate a wider range of perspectives into the ways we make meanings in school.⁶² Banks argues that *'individuals who know the world only from their own cultural and ethnic perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated'*.⁶³ Also, individuals who know the world only from other peoples' perspectives are denied their identity and dignity. This is the situation of building educational values on colonial values. The absence of multicultural education in Cameroon is portrayed in the direct transfer of colonial values and experiences to the educational system in Cameroon. For example, the contents of study, the use of textbooks, lack of tolerance for religious studies which constitute an

⁶² De Melndez, W. R. -Ostertag, V., *Teaching Young Children in Multicultural Classrooms: Issues, Concepts and Strategies*, New York, International Thomson Publishing, 1997, p.71.

⁶³ Banks, J., 2002, p. 1.

intrinsic experience of Africans like Cameroonians, little attention to the values and experiences of Cameroonians in the construction of the curriculum and the inability to appeal to the traditional modes of learning portray alienation in educational theory and practice. This is expressed in the syllabuses of History in the French sub-system and Philosophy in the English sub-system. This is cultural alienation. The outcome of this learning activity can be equated to the Swahili proverb which states that 'Food cooked in borrowed pots cannot kill hunger'.

In the second place, multiculturalism provides appropriate representation of groups previously excluded and marginalised because of gender, class, region, religion, tribe, culture and language in the school curriculum. Public schools should be places where students hear the stories of many groups. The curriculum should present the perspectives of women as well as men, the poor as well as the rich, and should not only celebrate the heroism of conquering generals in history, but those who are victorious in the struggles of everyday. Objective reality in the process of education is probably multi-coloured.⁶⁴ There is a need to deconstruct the philosophy, which upholds the view that ideas and values of one group are superior or inferior to the other. No culture is perfect, although one can talk of an advanced culture. Culture is a dynamic reality and every culture has the potency to grow. The conception of one culture as advanced cannot be translated to the superiority of that culture. Therefore, the story of every culture has the potentiality of educating.⁶⁵

In the third place, multiculturalism is a perspective for change in school systems. Multiculturalism is a diverse doctrine which includes feminists, human right activists and social critics. The charge that multicultural education wants to purge the school curriculum of western culture is false. Multiculturalism as the term denotes does not require schools to rid the curriculum of stories of white, males and

⁶⁴Tangwa, G., "Ethics in African Education" in Nsamenang, A. B. & Tchombe, T. M., *Handbook of African Educational Theories & Practices: A Generative Teacher Education Curriculum*. Bamenda, Presses Universitaire d'Afrique, 2011, pp. 91-106.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

substitute the experiences of women, gays, Africans and other exploited and disadvantaged persons.⁶⁶ A multicultural curriculum entertains classroom diversity whereby students are expected to study the cultures in the surrounding communities. This approach helps learners develop pride in their heritage, like native language and cultures. With this curricular approach, one has to adapt classroom activities to meet the teaching and learning needs. In this context, a teacher draws from different cultural contexts around to promote cultural understanding and increase cultural sensitivity. This perspective leads to the building of a stronger and more inclusive community by promoting tolerance, justice and respect amongst our students. The establishment of an atmosphere of acceptance is possible where the opinion of every student is recognised. This approach enhances mutual respect and prevents stereotypes and pigeonholing persons because of cultural and regional differences.

In the fourth place, multicultural education is a responsible curriculum to good citizenship. Although the schools are opened to all persons, the ways of life, foods, religions and history are not found in the curriculum.⁶⁷ New syllabus expects Cameroonians to exchange habits and rituals for a homogenized Cameroonian culture of colonial heritage. The unstated curricular message is this: abandon your cultures and learn to prize the Literature, Philosophies, History, Traditions and holidays of French colonial heritage. This is a familiar model of cultural assimilation. Proponents of the incumbent curricular approach are encouraging students to teach social behaviours and patriotic rituals designed to encourage “francophonization” of all English speaking Cameroonians. Take the examples of the syllabus of Philosophy in Anglophone secondary schools and the choice of texts of study. What does the negligence of philosophical texts written by Africans as well as Cameroonian philosophers signify? Such assimilation has worked well and some aspects are made manifest in the curriculum. The neglect of indigenous experiences, ethnic histories, cultures and languages as

⁶⁶Sobol, T. « Understanding Diversity », *Educational Leadership*, (1990) 48(3), pp. 27-30.

⁶⁷Nieto, S. *Affirming Diversity: The Socio-political Context of Multicultural Education*. New York: Longman, 1992, (ED 361 440), p. 28.

irrelevant to education is a compromise to the development of multicultural dispositions in an attempt to educate Cameroonians to love one another. Nation building and the politics of unity and national integration can only work in the context where Cameroonians are made to understand that the diverse cultures have a common origin and leading to the same destiny. Consequently, we need a new curriculum which acknowledges the importance of socialization and nation building for an increasing diverse population. The curriculum has to foster cultural diversity. A multicultural curriculum recognizes that to teach the nation's history appropriately require teaching from multiple perspectives.

In the fifth place, multiculturalism enhances a conducive school climate and pedagogy. The multicultural approach posits the objective of establishing change. The change to be effected is not limited to the curriculum, but extends to addressing affective issues. Schools and the people in them need to accommodate diversity, eradicate stereotypes, enhance self-esteem, encourage all members of the community to have a voice and demand educational achievement. Pluralism of ethnicity is the commonest feature of all classrooms in Cameroon especially in urban settings. At times, Cameroon like other African countries suffer from ethnic conflicts. These conflicts have devastating effects on the political and socio-economic development of the country. The governing styles of colonial regimes privileged some ethnic groups over others. Take the case of the Balis in the Northwest Cameroon. The aftermath of this has been the activation of ethnic enmity. This obliges us to think of an educational alternative that deconstructs ethnic superiority. Multicultural education offers a conducive classroom atmosphere for such a deconstruction. The school is a microcosm of society. Thus, changes effected in the school transforms the society simultaneously to reflect the values in school. For instance, a classroom of tolerance ensures a society of tolerance.

In the final place, multiculturalism is a challenge to cultural superiority. Multiculturalism challenges the vertical view of cultural development as a refined production of an elite class. It recognizes, from an anthropological perspective, that all cultures have resources and value. Exchange between cultures is primordial. For one to be

able to dialogue with other cultures in the world of globalization, one has to be immersed in one's own culture.⁶⁸ This serves as an antidote to alienation. In the context of the educational system in Cameroon, dialogue between the cultures of the two sub-systems is imperative. The two sub-systems are based on cultures of colonial heritage. They constitute our history and there is need to share the experiences between these two cultures in order to determine the future of Cameroon in educational development.

Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate whether a multicultural education alternative serves as the basis for education to peace and good citizenship in Cameroon. This objective led us to question whether this educational alternative promotes values of peace and good citizenship in a multi-ethnic society like Cameroon. Is it possible to teach from different cultural perspectives without degenerating to a conflict of cultures in Cameroon? In this paper, the multicultural education is presented as an educational alternative that promotes cultural pluralism, recognition, tolerance and equity in the society. Respect of all persons irrespective of place, religion, region, culture, language and ethnic group constitutes the characteristic of multiculturalism. The description of multiculturalism underlined the fact that it is neither an anti-western movement nor a monocultural educational approach.

Also, we highlighted the different typologies and dimensions of multicultural education as presented by James Banks. The content-oriented, student-oriented and socially-oriented programs constitute major perspectives of multicultural education that are relevant to educational development in Cameroon. The five dimensions of multicultural education proposed by Banks also lead us to other perspectives of organising multicultural education. There were some critical charges against multiculturalism. This educational alternative was criticized for giving greater attention to the politics of redistribution rather than the politics of recognition. This problem

⁶⁸ Njoh Mouelle, E., *De la médiocrité à l'excellence: Essai sur la signification humaine du développement*, Yaounde, Editions Clé, 1972, p. 5.

was resolved with the thesis that both politics of redistribution and recognition are intrinsically linked to multicultural education alternative. In spite of the critical charges levelled against multicultural education, there are some reasons to think that this educational alternative offers invaluable perspectives for educational development in Cameroon.

On the foregoing grounds, one can therefore maintain that from the categories of multicultural education, educators may attempt to develop programs that reflect the diversity of Cameroon schools. Public articulation of the programs and goals of specific approaches can help to temper some of the political rhetoric surrounding multicultural education, and give educators and policy makers on all sides of the issue a common basis for their discussions. Multiculturalism is not about putting one group against others or claiming that everyone's perspective is more valid or more valued. Multicultural education is about fairness and justice⁶⁹. In the past, some values in the educational system in Cameroons have done a disservice to the students by assuming a single view of truth and ignoring the needs of the students to create knowledge of the world by considering multiple truths and multiple perspectives. A multicultural society will obviously have competing views of truths and multiple sources of knowledge.

This educational approach prepares all Cameroonians to work actively towards structural equality in organizations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions and skills for the distribution of power and income among diverse groups. Therefore, the school curriculum in Cameroon has to directly address issues of tribalism, regionalism, classism, linguisticism, ageism, religiosity and xenophobia. With Glazer, it is important to argue that we are all multiculturalists, because it is omnipresent here, necessary and unavoidable.⁷⁰ Whether we are for it or against it, all groups, ethnic, religious, tribal, regional belong to any study of the Cameroonian

⁶⁹Hilliard, A. G., "Restructuring Teacher Education for Multicultural Imperatives," in Hunter, W.A., (ed.), *Multicultural Education through Competency-Based Teacher Education*, Washington DC, AACTE 1974. P. 34.

⁷⁰Glazer, N., *We are All Multiculturalists Now*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 83.

culture because of their unique contributions and perspectives. It is therefore important to integrate the teaching, respect and tolerance of ethnic pluralism in the curricula of the teacher education at all levels in Cameroon. It can be examined as a single discipline in Anthropology of education or a cross-cutting theme in the curriculum.

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African Culture and African Philosophy of Education

Peter Takov

Abstract

In this paper, we have analysed the concepts of culture, philosophy and education with the observation that they carry with them a variable cauldron of interpretations and perspectives within the African context. The combination of these concepts within the framework of an African knowledge system with a global outlook can bring about a proper amalgamation with the African. It belongs to the sphere of education to make the link between the past and the present. An educational philosophy proper Africa can contribute to the transformation of educational discourse in Africa, which draws upon whatever intellectual skills people possess in order that they may eliminate the various dimensions of the African predicament. Through initiation rites, African dialectic games, stories, proverbs, etc., we can better appropriate the African educational baggage. Thus, there arises a great need for indigenizing and integrating the curriculum. Hope for education in Africa depends on resounding visions of Africa's history and reconstructing it to the present, but also in displacing dominant discourses.

Introduction

The concepts of culture, philosophy and education carry with them a variable cauldron of interpretations and perspectives within the African context. In this paper, we shall not only examine the conceptual underpinnings of culture, philosophy and education respectively, but establish *de facto* that only a combination of these concepts within the framework of an African knowledge system with a global outlook can bring about a proper amalgamation with the African. But first, we must clarify what we mean by these concepts: culture, African, Philosophy and Education.

In brief, we can define culture in a broad sense as a man-made structure of changing patterns of behaviour. This definition would be of great importance in our understanding of what education is. From this, in broad sense, we can define education functionally as mediation between nature and culture. Looking at education from the point of view of the nature of the child, we can define it as the process of fulfilment of a child's potential of transcendence, where we see transcendence as the natural capacity for cultural achievement. Man, as a whole, is defined by this potential.

From the forgone, education and philosophy are both cultural patterns of behaviour. In this light, we can define philosophy as the search for the rational foundation of cultural behaviour.

Philosophy *qua* philosophy is an activity which is not directed toward describing culture but toward pursuing ideals of truth, goodness, beauty etc., which are transcendent of any particular culture.

The culture of a society is that structure of meaning, the spiritual climate and soil, on which people and institutions depend for their nourishment, health and vitality. Being the whole way of life, material and non-material of a human society, culture is essentially social, the product of a society's tradition and its interaction with other societies. We can thus say that it is a dynamic, not static product of human history.¹

Shorter goes on to make the assertion that culture is made up of "invention" and "convention". He defines "convention" as what is held in common, "agreed upon," in society, and "invention" as referring to the appropriation of culture by individuals or groups of individuals, who in so doing contribute to its constant development.²

From the above, we can pose the question whether we can talk of an "African culture" given the fact that the continent is such a huge mosaic with startling diversities.³ To answer this question, Tatah Mbuy argues that though being a huge continent, Africa's variety is

¹ A. Shorter, *African Culture: An Overview*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 1998, p. 22.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³ T. Mbuy, *The Faith of our Ancestors*, Bamenda, Archdiocesan Print Media, 2012, p. 57.

so intertwined to the extent that a normal African always thinks in terms of the community and not of the individual.⁴

To this understanding of culture can be added that of Levi-Strauss who asserts that culture is primarily the product of man's mind as he creates a new environment out of nature. Being an aspect of what it means to be human, culture is a basic human right. Acculturation must not turn into cultural antagonism or cultural supremacy. This is an abuse of human rights and occurs when cultural qualities are imposed on a culture against the needs of its members. People do not learn their culture by heart, but as a set of ideas and norms that are committed to memory. They learn how to use and adapt their culture, how to "play the game" of culture.⁵

For the purpose of this paper, we shall define African philosophy simply as the philosophy that is nourished within an African cultural experience, tradition and history. African philosophy has a spirit proper to it. This spirit is that of a metaphysical and spiritual orientation which is more of co-existence with nature rather than conquest, more of collectivism rather than individualism, more of holism rather than atomism, more of synthesis rather than analysis, more of relations rather than separation, unity rather than dualism or monism.

The Educational Sphere

It belongs to the sphere of education to make the link between the past and the present. Education remains the ground on which social memories are transmitted. It is the place on which society produces and reproduces, in a critical way, its cultural identity. The content of the identity depends on the nature and history of this society. This dimension has to be taken into account because we have to consider ourselves as descendants and heirs to a given tradition.

This makes the necessity of an African philosophy of education imperative. It is urgent to envisage a model of education which can permit each African to find a style of life which forms a harmony in the management of his private and social life.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵ A. Shorter, *African Culture: An Introduction*, p. 24.

The actual development model of Africa is strongly contested because of the great losses of cultural parameters proper to Africa. It is thus urgent to rethink an education which can favour a greater cultural output of African nations.

We shall thus propose educational strategies which will favour this. We hereby put forth the idea of an educational system which will adopt a pedagogic strategy capable of contributing to a type of education suited for complementarity and between the subject and his environment to the extent that the personal growth results from the interaction between the individual and his environment.⁶

The Possibility of an African Philosophy of Education

An educational philosophy proper to Africa can contribute to the transformation of educational discourse in Africa, in particular empowering communities to participate in their own educational development, since it respects diversity, acknowledges lived experience and challenges the hegemony of Western Eurocentric forms of universal knowledge.

This empowerment of communities, as well as their educational development, could be achieved through the use of whatever intellectual skills they possess to eliminate the various dimensions of the African predicament⁷.

This notion of an African philosophy of education grows out of two earlier views expounded by Hountondji⁸ and others such as

⁶ P. Fonkoua, "Education-Développement," in Gianna Pallante (ed.), *Pour Une Education à la Mondialité en Afrique*, Yaounde, Presse de l'UCAC, 2003, pp. 165-173.

⁷ By African predication we mean the amelioration of the human condition as a consequence of poverty, hunger, famine, unemployment, political oppression, civil wars, colonialism (imperialism) and economic exploitation

⁸ In *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa*, Ohio University Center for International Studies, Athens 1985).

Appiah⁹ and K. Wiredu¹⁰, on the one hand, and Gyekye¹¹ and others such as Kaphagawani¹² and Kwame S.¹³, on the other.

Hountondji posits that African philosophy is a rational, critical activity which happens independently of traditional African worldviews; whereas Gyekye contends that the rationalist approach to philosophy ought to be extended to traditional African worldviews through practice of ethnophilosophy. Moreover, in defence of a form of human activism which could ameliorate the disempowered African condition is the notion of *ubuntu* or humaneness.

Ubuntu is a form of humanism which could engender “communal ‘embeddedness’ and connectedness of a person to other persons”.¹⁴ Such an understanding of *Ubuntu* could orientate an African philosophy of education towards the cultivation of “virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy and respect and concern for others”.¹⁵

An African philosophy of education has to be a particular kind of discourse which draws upon whatever intellectual skills people possess in order that they may eliminate the various dimensions of the African predicament. The phrase “whatever intellectual skills” has a clear connection with analytical reasoning and intellectual rigour put forth by Hountondji, but also does not exclude oral tradition or sagacity (that is, the wisdom of sages) nor African cultural discourses such as music and drama.

Here, there is a development of an understanding of African thought and practice inextricably related to rigorous analytical, critical and rational inquiry, on the one hand, and ethno-philosophy (oral traditions, sagacity and cultural discourse), on the other hand.

⁹ In *Necessary Questions: Introduction to Philosophy*, Prentice-Hill, Engel Wood Cliffs 1989.

¹⁰ In *Cultural Universals and Particulars: an African Perspective*, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1996.

¹¹ In *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹² In “African Epistemology,” in Coetzee P., ed., *Philosophy from Africa*, Johannesburg, Thompson Publishers, 1998.

¹³ *How not to Teach African Philosophy*, APA Newsletter 91(1), 1992.

¹⁴ P. Higgs, “African Philosophy and the Transformation of Educational Discourse in South Africa,” in *Journal of Education*, 2003, 30: pp. 1-22.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

Initiation Rites

Initiation rites have a great educational purpose. The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated. It is a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man-woman relationship.¹⁶

African Didactic Games

In African societies oral tradition is an important instrument of adaptive learning. The basic forms or genres are: riddles, proverbs, songs, folk-tales, historical narratives and myths. Riddles are the most basic form of symbol; all symbols are fundamentally riddles, challenging the listener to explore experience in order to discover further meaning. Riddles usually lead from a human experience to an experience of nature. Riddling is a didactic game that sharpens one's powers of observation and comparison. Examples abound: "my house has no doors and windows": answer is "an egg".¹⁷

Proverbs are riddles in reverse. Usually, they lead the audience from a natural experience to a human experience. They are statements or observations about life, which suspend judgment, even to the point of cynicism, for example: "The stomach of your friend is a bush," that is, a person gets lost in the secret thoughts of even his best friend. The stomach here is seen as the seat of secret thoughts and the bush as the place where a person gets lost.¹⁸

Stories and proverbs:

Stories and proverbs are primary ways through which a great deal of African philosophical thought, knowledge and wisdom has been

¹⁶ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1969, 122.

¹⁷ Aylward Shorter, p. 57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

taught.¹⁹ Preliterate African culture was characterized by an oral tradition that found expression in stories, folktales, anecdotes, proverbs, and parables that provoked a great deal of reflection. As there were no written records of the ancient past of the people, all that has been preserved of their knowledge, myths, philosophies, liturgies, songs, and sayings has been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. These oral media preserved, more or less accurately, the history of the people, their general outlook on life, and their conduct and moral values, and they were used in rural communities as forms of indigenous knowledge which played an important role in the education of the young. For example, adults would gather youngsters around a fire at night and tell them great stories and legends about the past that helped the youngsters to grasp the prevailing ethical standards of their community. Stories that personified animal characters were often told, and these stories, while explaining the peculiar trait of each animal, also transmitted the virtues valued by the society. For example, stories about the spider, always taught youngsters about the unwanted consequences of traits such as greed, egotism, disobedience, or cunning. Typically, a spider story would begin with a question such as “Do you know why the spider has such a slender waist?” The question would then be answered by an instructional story such as the following:

Spider was invited to two feasts in two villages at the same time. Not wanting to miss either feast, Spider tied a rope around his waist and gave each end of the rope to each village. He instructed each village to pull the rope precisely when the feast began. The harder Spider was pulled in each direction, the smaller his waist became. He screamed and screamed in pain till his neighbour heard his cries and came and untied the rope. Through greed, therefore, Spider lost the feast in each village and never regained his waistline.

Proverbs are particularly useful as powerful tools that teach without being intrusive. A great deal of African traditional wisdom and folklore is expressed through proverbs which have the ability to reveal the characteristics and qualities of situations, times, and persons in a way that is hard to capture in clear language or in a direct

¹⁹ Kwame G., *African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1995.

manner. In addition to stories, therefore, proverbs were used in indigenous education to teach moral values and appropriate behaviours without directly and overtly moralizing and criticizing an individual. Many of these proverbs survived in the lyrics of songs. Most of these could be seen painted especially on taxis, for example: “No pain no gain”; “Don’t look where you fell, look where you tripped”; “Nobody knows from which direction the wind will blow to bend the chicken’s ear” (meaning: it’s not always possible to predict the sources of one’s good or bad fortune).

Stories and proverbs can be understood as metaphors to guide moral choice and self-examination because, when reflected upon, they act as mirrors for seeing things in a particular way. More than any theoretical discussion or philosophical writing, they throw light on the concrete reality of lived experience; they serve as important pedagogical devices because they provide experiential case material on which pedagogical reflection is possible.²⁰ As learners break into (analyse) the proverbs or stories they are able to reflect on the meanings and implications embedded in the experiences. Indigenous educators drew on these teaching devices to informally structure an educational program that encouraged learners to listen to stories and proverbs and reflect on them to derive meanings that informed and guided conduct and behaviour. Furthermore, these devices brought together the learners and the community because the elders, as the sources of the stories, songs, and proverbs and as experts in oratory, were charged with the responsibility of teaching them to the young.

Unfortunately, these powerful traditional teaching and learning tools were negated in colonial education, despite the fact that their usefulness as sources of African wisdom and cultural knowledge had been well documented by nineteenth-century scholars and missionaries like J. G. Christaller, who collected and published well over three thousand stories and proverbs.²¹

The inclusion of these indigenous educational tools in colonial education would have also addressed the problem of the separation between the school and the community that was introduced during

²⁰ Van M. Max, *Researching Lived Experience*, New York, SUNY Press, 1990.

²¹ C. Johannes, *A Collection of 3,600 Tshi (Twi) Proverbs and Stories*, Evangelical Missionary Society, Basel 1879.

colonial administration. This negation of indigenous knowledge can be explained by the fact that colonial education was an ideological process in which education and schooling were used as agents for the internalization and acceptance of colonial cultural values, and as vehicles for developing in the colonized peoples the preferred sense of psychological and intellectual subordination. Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriades have categorized these practices of negation as *resentment* (after Nietzsche) which they describe as “the specific practice of identity displacement in which the social actor consolidates his identity by a complete disavowal of the merits and existence of his social other.”²² With Linda Tuhiwai Smith, I posit that the negation of indigenous views constituted a critical part of the colonial strategy, mostly because these views would have challenged and resisted the mission of colonization.²³

Crisis in Education in Africa

Crisis connotes a major dislocation, a rupture of the fundamental institutions, habits, practices, attitudes of any given culture or any section of a culture. When a point is reached in which the major functions, the major structures, the major purposes of a culture or sub-culture are thrown out of joint, then its members often find themselves bewildered, lost, uprooted. They and their culture are in a state of crisis. This is the situation in which education in Africa today finds itself.

Education is a universal phenomenon and plays an important/indispensable part in the lives of people, for whenever two or more people live together in any kind of organized fashion, education is involved.

Let us take a look at the universality of the educative process. Every culture is entirely learned; it is not, in any sense, inherited through the genetic structure. Language is a beautiful example. All of

²² McCarthy Cameron and Dimitriades Greg, “Globalizing Pedagogies: Power, Resentment, and the Re-narration of Difference,” in *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives*, eds., Nicholas Burbules and Carlos Torres, New York, Routledge, 2000, 187 - 204.

²³ Smith Linda T., *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London, Zed Books, London 2002.

us have inherited the genetic capacity to speak, to write, to hear a language. But we do not in any sense whatever inherit the capacity to speak, to write, or to read a particular language. This we learn. We learn from the culture, from the “teachers” of the culture, who are first of all our fathers and mothers, or medicine men, or community leaders. And so, we learn our culture from infancy by the process of acquisition that is universal to man. As we grow into adults we are thus able to carry on the practices, habits, traditions, customs, and skills, which our culture has gradually developed through long periods of history.

Meanwhile, as we learn to transmit the culture to others, we equally learn how to modify it. We learn how to effect gradual or sometimes even quite abrupt changes in the habits, skills, and customs we have acquired. We never merely transmit the same cultural process we have acquired from preceding generations. Always, in some slight degree at least, we modify through our ability to improve upon older ways, to meet new problems and conflicts.

On the one hand, this is a process of education proper to a given culture in which there is stabilization, transmission, guarantee of continuity within the culture. On the other hand, there is a process of correcting, improving, and altering the acquired characteristics of past generations.

Now, in an African context where the major parts of culture find themselves in a state of acute dislocation, with all the accompanying conflicts, destructions, and bewilderments that inevitably occur when there is such dislocation, in such a time as ours, an African philosophy of education should invariably reflect the mood of the culture. Here, education becomes more diagnostic and prognostic, in ways that remind us of medicine.

Every philosophical enquiry must have these four major areas of concern: it must be critical, analytical, explicative and reflective. Within the context of African philosophy, we can identify these four areas as: political philosophy, formal philosophy, cultural philosophy and ethnophilosophy, respectively. These form the major approaches in every philosophy of education, which are: critical approach, analytical approach, existential approach and implications approach.

It is within this framework that philosophical thinking about education in Africa must be located.

Practical Implications

Traditional African education is an integral part of the culture and history of a local community, which is stored in various forms and transmitted through various modes. Such modes, as we have already mentioned, include: language, music, dance, oral tradition, proverbs, myths, stories, culture and religion. Traditional African education, which is passed from one generation to another, is usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has to some extent been the basis for sustainable development in agriculture, food preparation, health care, conservation and other sectors for many centuries. This mode of education has by and large been used as a way of acquiring life-long learning.

Contrary to the widespread belief held by early foreign observers in Africa that Africa was a dark continent before their arrival, the continent had already reached a high level of educational development, which had evolved over time. The coming of European (Western) education from the late 15th Century onwards disrupted the traditional system and brought the formal school system at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the learning of European languages, literature, history, philosophy, as well as the science subjects, including mathematics, biology, physics and chemistry.

African system of education appreciates the basic values of traditional education, which emphasizes the inclusion of all, and the pursuit of excellence and quality has always been an important aim. Informal and vocational training constitute the core of indigenous education in Africa. Under this traditional system, each person in the community is practically trained and prepared for his/her role in society. It is a holistic system, in which storytelling, proverbs and myths also play an important role.

Indigenizing and Integrating the Curriculum

An important area where researchers could seek information and knowledge valuable for indigenizing the curriculum is communal education. For many, the community is a principal educator, as implied in the African adage: "It takes a village to raise a child." This proverb is further illustrated by the maxims: "One white ant does not build an ant hill" or "One hand does not tie a bundle" that reflect the tradition of community involvement in providing education. The assumption is that when learning is matched with local needs, education, whether indigenous or formal, can have a galvanizing effect on the lives of the learners.

To reevaluate community involvement is one strategy for acknowledging the impact of culture on people, history, knowledge, and experiences. This can be realized when individuals, families, communities, and indigenous teachers all have the opportunity to participate in formulating curriculum policies, developing curriculum programs, and implementing these policies and programs. With such participatory practice, community members would ensure sensitivity to traditional customs and social norms, leading to a more culturally appropriate formal education. Yet, because community involvement is complex, few attempts have been made in contemporary Africa to indigenize or integrate the curriculum.

The Implications of Neglecting African Traditional Education to the Modern African Society

The traditional African system of education, with its curricular content, were and still very effective, that a total rejection of African heritage will leave African societies in a vacuum that can only be filled with confusion, loss of identity and a total break in integrational communication.²⁴ The assumption of Mara is underscored by the fact that human beings are by nature social creatures, whose basic drive and instinct lead them to create moral values that bind themselves together into communities. They are also rational and their rationality

²⁴ J. Mara K., 'The Virtues and Challenges of Traditional African Education' in *Journal of Pan African studies*. Vol. 1, No4 June 2006, pp. 15-24.

allows them to create ways of cooperating with one another spontaneously. Religion has often helped in this process,²⁵ therefore the natural state of man is not the war of everyone against everyone but rather a civic society made orderly by the presence of host of moral rules.

It was Fukuyama (1999) that described these moral rules/values as social capital²⁶. He consequently, maintains the inseparable relationship between social capital and crime in the modern world. According to him, social capital is a cooperative norm that has become embedded in relationship among a group of people, while crime represents the violation of community norms. Thus, social capital warrants the members of a group to expect others in a group within the social order to behave reliably and honestly and this in turn brings trust within the social existence.²⁷

However, Okoro laments the untold consequences of neglecting or rather abandoning of the traditional socializing philosophy of Africa on the modern African societies as he observes the following:

- *Unemployment*: African people noted for enterprising spirit and personal industry have been reduced to mere job seekers, instead of job creators, which they were before the imperial period. This situation has created social disequilibrium, which has resulted to restiveness and crisis at every sector of the socio-political and economic life of African societies.

- *The neglect of moral values*: Due to the fact that the contemporary market economy does not support morality or value personal industry, Africans have joined the rest of the world, especially the west to adopt wholesomely the unethical means to sustaining their existence, since it is against logic to obey any law in a lawless society. This ethical position has resulted in large scale crimes in the form of prostitution, embezzlement, armed robbery, fraud including cyber

²⁵ F. Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstruction of Social Order*, London, Profile Books, 1999, p. 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁷ K. Okoro, 'Women and Peace Initiative in Igbo Traditional Society: a Viable Option for Peace Building Process in Nigeria' *A Paper Presented at the International conference on Research and Development*. Held at Universite Nationale Du Benin, Cotonou, Republic of Benin Book of Proceeding Vol. 2. No.17 November, 2009, pp. 74-87.

fraud, kidnapping, youth restiveness, violent destruction of life and property of individual and the public at large. These constitute a major breach of peace in modern Africa.²⁸

It could therefore be noted that with the neglect of African traditional education in modern Africa, the values of social solidarity has become ousted. Hence Uwalaka (2003) avers in relation to Igbo community thus:

*The celebrated Igbo solidarity has drastically waned and continued to vanish...today this excessive individualism is now on the Igbo throne, geocentricism and selfishness have become driving force, personal interest and subdued common interest, personal agenda over group, nothing is sacrificed in the higher interest of the group. Internal destruction, competition has taken over cooperation and collaboration.*²⁹

Overly, some of the situations enumerated have great implications for peace initiatives in modern Africa. Thus the modern African society has become utilitarian in outlook and organization. It has also adopted individualism as her epistemological vision for organizing the society. The spirit of individualism has been given an apt description by Uwalaka (2003), as he writes: “this individualism is calm and considered feeling, which disposes each citizen to locate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraws into the circle of families and friends, with this little society formed to his taste, he gradually leaves the society to look after itself.”³⁰ Unfortunately, this type of individualism has made African people become a people, who listen to no one, agrees on nothing and cannot pursue any common good.³¹ This situation can account for most violent conflicts and wars in Africa.

²⁸K. Okoro N., ‘Cultural Globalization, the Last Onslaught on African Personality: The Igbo Example’ *A Paper Presented at the International conference on Sustainable development between 15-18 September, 2009* at the Main Hall Of University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus- Nigeria, Book of Proceeding Vol. 5. No.3 2009, 22-33.

²⁹ J. Uwalaka, *The Struggle for Inclusive Nigeria: Igbo's to Be or Not to Be? A Treatise on Igbo Political Personality and survival in Nigeria. To Nwa Igbo*, Owerri Snaap, 2003, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 33.

³¹ Okoro N., ‘Cultural Globalization, the Last Onslaught on African Personality: The Igbo Example’ *A Paper Presented at the International conference on*

On the whole, the advent of the colonial model of education in modern Africa withdraws the children from the society and inculcates them with values and knowledge that make it difficult for them to return to their society. Thus, Africans have become rootless and a people without a historical past in the modern world. Therefore, the result is confusion, oppression, marginalization, militarization, violent conflicts and ultimately war in most African societies.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to our enquiry, the point we wish to reiterate here is the following: if the African philosophy of education is to develop as an educational discipline in its own right within the African context, then educational philosophers and educationists in Africa must focus their attention directly on these four areas of concern. Put differently, we need philosophical studies on education in Africa that reflect the functions of the rational, critical, existential and speculative functions. These studies must further adopt the various approaches of educational philosophy and, in order to be truly African in orientation, they must follow the different trends in African philosophy. Only then may we begin to speak of an African philosophy of education.

The idea of an African philosophy of education may be thwarted for two reasons: philosophers of education are more concerned about their own survival than in being activists for a new philosophy of education; the erosion of discipline-based approaches in new policies on teacher education. In Africa, where indigenous knowledge systems reside among the majority of its people and Western philosophies remain dominant through new forms of colonization latent in processes such as globalization, an African philosophy of education is vital. Hope for education in Africa depends on recounting visions of Africa's history and reconstructing it to the present, but also in displacing dominant discourses, including those

Sustainable development between 15-18 September, 2009 at the Main Hall Of University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus- Nigeria. Book of Proceeding Vol. 5. No.3 2009, 22-33.

evident in African policy documents such as the Norms and Standards for Educators. African philosophy (of education) as a reconstructive/deconstructive force might offer hope for education in Africa. It will also avert the danger of a single African philosophy (of education) from becoming dominant in the way that Fundamental Pedagogics did under apartheid.

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The Reality of Secularism in Africa and its Effects on Some African Cultural Values

Nelson Shang

Abstract

*Given the many conflicts that characterize contemporary intellectual discourse, the one between secularism and religion is emerging as one of the most crucial. Recently, there was in France and Turkey the debate on the laicity of the state; in the United States there was the debate on the theologization of politics; Italy is preoccupied with the debate on the relation between relativism and faith; and last but not the least, there is, in Britain, the rage over the conflict of science and religion ignited by Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*. This gives the impression that the phenomenon of secularism is solely the concern of the West. Just a few decades ago, Africa was seen as booming with various forms of religions – Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. However, in view of the globalization process, of the power of the mass media, and of the rapidity of urbanization on the continent, it would be strange to believe that it is not already there. The aim of this paper is to discover the various ways in which secular values are at work in the African society, the manner in which they erode or displace religious and cultural values and the danger they pose to the youths of today. We shall equally pause to look at the reality of secularism in the Cameroonian society, particularly at the level of the educational system. Our argument in this paper is neither that religion should be the dominant factor in the society nor that religion should be completely wiped out of the society.*

Introduction

During the Medieval period, a great attempt was made to build the life of the earthly community and civilization on religious principles. This attempt succeeded for some centuries and then failed after the Reformation and the Renaissance. In the modern period, an attempt was made to base the life of civilization and the earthly

community on mere reason – reason separated from religion. This attempt fostered immense hopes in the 18th and 19th centuries and then rapidly failed. Pure reason showed itself more incapable than religious faith of ensuring the spiritual unity of mankind, and the dream of a “scientific” creed, uniting human beings in peace and in common convictions about the aims and basic principles of human life and society, vanished with the catastrophes of the 20th century¹ – a century that has preached and implemented secularism to the fullest. One can therefore say that “before the Enlightenment humanity had duties toward God, whereas after the Enlightenment it also had them toward reason.”² This is not surprising given that in the 19th century, in Germany Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God and of all traditional morality. In France, August Comte elaborated the law of three stages relegating the religious and metaphysical stages to the benefit of the positive stage; in Britain the Utilitarianism of Mill and the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels provided the basic intellectual norms while the American naturalism of the pragmatists especially that of John Dewey was gaining grounds. These theories led to the birth of human beings who had no need of religion in their daily activities. Religion became a hypothesis that could be done away with. This is the mentality that spilt over into the 20th century. It is, therefore, very obvious why the 20th century stands out as the darkest century in history in terms of its attitude towards religion and as a consequence towards the degeneration and degradation of human dignity. The two world wars, the various genocides and atrocious terrorist activities bear witness to this.

On the African continent, however, the story was somewhat different. Religion was still a great signpost influencing the social, economic and political systems to operate in conformity with religious principles and with due regard for the supernatural. However, it is undeniable that this influence of religion on public life has declined and that modern civilization, governed by economic values has produced a mind closed to the transcendent values. This

¹ J. Maritain, J., *Man and the State*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1951, p. 41.

² S. Zabala, “A Religion without Atheists or Theists” in R. Rorty and G. Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 3.

tragic trend which we characterize as secularism constitutes a very serious danger especially to the youths of today, many of whom – either consciously or unconsciously – are to their own peril, swallowing up the secular culture in huge gulps.³

“Africans are notoriously religious.”⁴ These opening words of J. Mbiti’s classic work *African Religions and Philosophy* are, in the words of S. Aylward and E. Onyancha, “just as notorious as the African religiosity they purport to describe.”⁵ These words have been universally quoted and they still correspond to most people’s idea of the African reality. The picture is one of ancient religious traditions and rituals still vigorously flourishing, of fanatical Islam dominating huge areas of the African continent, of Christians in their first fervour filling churches to overflowing, of new religious movements proliferating everywhere.⁶

In contrast to this religiously edifying vision in Africa, the western world is seen to be dominated by a relentless and inexorable secularism. McTernan is of the opinion that:

The ‘secularization thesis’ that dominates contemporary Western political thinking is based on the premises that the decline in religion is an irreversible process. The enlightenment, the secularists argue, challenged the old religious certainties, making science the new paradigm of understanding the world. Religion lingers on as a comforting myth for those who need support in times of personal crisis but having been relegated from the mainstream to the backwaters it has ceased to have any impact on the social or political life in modern society. Religion therefore is seen as an ‘epiphenomenon’ - it represents something other than what it appears to be – and as such, they maintain, it has no real role in shaping a new international order.⁷

³ R. Ntungwe, *Secularism in Cameroon*, unpublished Dissertation, Bambui, STAMS, 1999, p. iv.

⁴ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann 1969, 1.

⁵ S. Aylward and Onyancha E., *Secularism in Africa. A Case Study: Nairobi City*, p. 11

⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷ O. McTernan, “If Religion Matters, Dialogue Matters” in *Aches Quarterly: Religion and Secularism*, Vol 2, Edition 3, Winter 2008, pp. 12-13.

For such thinkers, religion is clung to only by those who are so stupid that they cannot see the arguments against it or are so clever that they can make up apparently true, but in reality false, arguments for why they continue to believe.⁸ Science is seen as the chief instrument of progress while religion – particularly Christianity – has been the main obstacle in its path.

If the West has, since the Enlightenment, gone so secularized and yet, as John Mbiti believes, the African is notoriously religious why talk of secularism in Africa today? Walter Rodney in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* opines that Africa's contact with Europe robbed her of great potentials both in human and material resources. This had caused the myriads of developmental challenges and loss of cultural values because colonialism impoverished Africa's cultural values and imposed a western culture that does not practice what it preaches. Fanon Frantz believed that "colonialism was a system of racial oppression, all more insidious, because of its impact as well as physical distortion of attitudes and behaviour". This position further reiterates the forceful nature of colonialism which created some complexities in the overall development of the colonized.

More importantly, in pre-colonial Africa, cultural values revolved around the African ideology and concept of God and this made most of the norms and laws acceptable to the people. In this regard, Benson Igboin explains:

*It is a fact that in African traditional belief, God is the explanation of all things. The world was created by him. The Africans therefore believe that the environment is knitted to the presence of God. As Mbiti (1969: 119) puts it, "God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance; it is as if God exists for the sake of man." God's agents are charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the society. Thus, both physical and supernatural forces are always present in the administration of the society.*⁹

⁸ J. Habgood, *Religion and Science*, London; Hodder and Stoughton, 1972, pp. 9-11.

⁹ Igboin Benson, "Colonialism and African Cultural Values," in *African Journal of History and Culture* Vol. 3(6), July 2011, p. 96.

Hence, although laws and norms differ from place to place depending on the people's culture or religion, the people held them important and attended to them in awe, until their contact with foreign culture, which dispossessed them of their valued system.¹⁰

Definitions and Understandings

Secularism

The term “secularism” was coined by George Jacob Holyoake in the 1840s. For him, this term referred to “a variety of utilitarian social ethics and sought human improvement through reason, science, and social organization.”¹¹ It advocated that the state should be tolerant to all religious and philosophical doctrines, and should be especially impartial in religious matters. Holyoake had been acting as a key figure in the secularist movement until Charles Bradlaugh developed a more radical form of secularism. In his *Doubts in Dialogue*, he began to criticize all religions including Christianity. Then the separation of religion and politics became the key dimension of secularism. “In the twentieth century, secularism is generally known as an ideology that advocates the eradication of religious influences in political, social, and educational institutions. As a worldview, secularism has generally emphasized separation between the religious and political spheres.”¹²

In the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, the word secularism is said to have come from the Latin *Saecularis* meaning *the time, the age, the world*. In this case, the secular stands in contrast to the sacred, making an approach to life divorced from the influence of religion and thus determined by temporal or worldly concerns.¹³ This view is refuted by Aylwards and Onyancha. For them, the sacred and secular represent two different ways of experiencing the same reality. In themselves, they are not in competition or conflict. At the sacred level, reality is experienced as being under the governance of God, as

¹⁰ Igboin Benson, “Colonialism and African Cultural Values,” in *African Journal of History and Culture Vol. 3(6)*, pp. 96-103, July 2011

¹¹ Mahmood Monshipouri, *Islamism, Secularism, and Human Rights in the Middle East*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p.10.

¹² Mahmood Monshipouri, *ibid*, p. 11.

¹³ W. L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1980, p. 519.

the object of religious faith. The secular, on the other hand, is the same reality construed as being accessible to humanity and under its control. The secular has nothing to do with the concept of *uncleanness*, and is therefore not intrinsically opposed to the sacred.¹⁴

Secularism, from what has been said above, is the separation of organized religion from organized political power inspired by a specific set of values¹⁵, including cultural values. It is the doctrine according to which the world is self-explanatory, without any need or recourse to God, who thus becomes superfluous. Secularism can be seen as the situation in which the secular is observed to dominate or even replace the sacred. With secularism, religious faith, for one reason or another, is felt to be unnecessary. It is a state in which organized religion loses its hold both at the level of social institutions and at the level of human consciousness. As such, secularism is a datum of modern society. It is a world view which, in theory and/or practice, denies the immanence of God.¹⁶

It is clear that a secular person is one who is concerned only with the present life in its concrete factuality and abandons the nostalgia for the life hereafter. He rejects a merely contemplative manner of experiencing religion and readily adheres to a kind of pragmatic empiricism in whose spirit he has more esteem for facts than for grand metaphysical or religious theories. At this stage it is necessary to make a distinction between secularism and secularization.

Secularization

Secularization relates essentially to a process of decline in religious activities, ways of thinking, beliefs, institutions, that occur primarily in association or as an unconscious or unintended consequence of other processes of social structural change such as industrialization or urbanization.¹⁷

¹⁴ Aylward S. and Onyanchae E., *Secularism in Africa. A Case Study: Nairobi City*, p.13.

¹⁵ Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," in *The Future of Secularism*, ed. Srinivasan, T. N. Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 20-53.

¹⁶ Aylward S. and Onyanchae E., *Secularism in Africa. A Case Study: Nairobi City*, p. 14.

¹⁷ B. R. Wilson, "Secularism" in M. ELIADE et al (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 13, New York, Macmillan, 1987, p. 159.

While secularization, unadulterated would seek to restore or attribute to earthly things their rightful autonomy, secularism insists that the world must be taken away from God and that everything must be given to man.¹⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach excellently articulates this position of secularism thus:

*In place of the love of God, we ought to acknowledge the love of man as the only true religion. In place of belief in God, we ought to expand man's belief in himself, in his own strength; the belief that humanity's destiny is dependent not on a being higher than humanity itself, that man's only demon is man himself – the primitive man, superstitious, egoistic evil, but that similarly man's only God is man himself.*¹⁹

This clearly expresses the dream of the enlightenment with its motto: *sapere aude* – dare to think for yourself. Here there is the explicit rejection of God and anything religious is relegated to the realm of superstition. Hence the enlightenment is considered as the source or origin of modern day secularism and secularization.²⁰

Modernization is therefore, to a very large extent, responsible for this secularization process in the world today.²¹ For Ernest Hocking, the “Modern World” is a distinct period of time only because it is a distinct state of mind. This state of mind begins in Western Europe, but becomes worldwide. There begins to be a world civilization; and there can be no such thing without mental world-contemporaneity; we are all moderns together. The distinctive note of this epoch is human self-reliance, technically implemented. A human know-how is everywhere in demand; and therefore the underlying sciences universally claimed. Human self-reliance naturally displaces reliance on God, so far as God is called on to meet human need. The word *Humanism* (and in our present case secularism) stands for the

¹⁸ K. Wojtyla, *Sign of Contradiction*, St. Paul's Publications, p. 32.

¹⁹ L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, (G. Eliot Trans), London, Harper and Row Publishers, 1957, p. 31.

²⁰ David Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2003.

²¹ Jeffreys K. Hadden, “Desacralizing Secularization Theory,” in *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered: Religion and the Political Order*, eds. Hadden, K. Jeffreys & Shupe, Anson, Volume III, (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. 3.

principle of displacement. The Modern World extends its human self-help by degrees; but it knows its method. We may look on the entire period as a progressive experiment in getting on without God in all-important practical matters.²²

Manifestation of Secularism in Africa

Secularism as Unbelief or Atheism

The word atheism comes from the Greek word *atheos* meaning *without God*. Atheism therefore denotes a system of thought that is opposed to theism – namely the view that there is a transcendent, personal God, who not only created the world but also preserves and governs it. Secularism may stem from explicit unbelief, the denial of the existence of God or of any religious dimension to human life. More often, it is an allegiance to a popular myth of science as the ultimate theory of everything, a conviction that the only truths are those which are accessible to scientific observation and experiment. Basically, it is a faith in unlimited human progress, apparently confirmed by the spectacular achievements of Western technology. This faith is, however already being shaken by the current ecological crisis, and the realization that the maintenance of material standards in Europe and North America depends on the collapse and possible elimination of vital resources.²³

Secularism in Africa takes the form of unbelief among intellectuals and *élites* in universities and higher educational institutions. It arises from dissatisfaction with organized religion and is imported from abroad, being disseminated through the education system and the encounter with Western technology. Unbelief tends to arise in the minds of the educated and, increasingly, the semi-educated, because religious education does not keep pace with

²² Hocking E., *The Struggle for Power and Peace*
<http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/IsGodNecessary/The-Struggle-for-Power-and-Peace.php>, (page consulted on the 4th May 2012)

²³ Ludwig Bertsch, "Inculturation in Europe's Societal Situation: An Introduction," in *Yearbook of Contextual Theologies*, Mission Institute, Aachen, 1993/4, p. 104).

secular and academic education.²⁴ We shall return to the issue of religious education later.

This analysis of unbelief among the academic community is certainly not far from the truth. African universities are part of a secular tradition of higher learning that stems from the Enlightenment and from parent universities in Europe. Religious authority was seen as repressive and opposed to true academic freedom. Such freedom demanded an open mind. This was conceived to be rational and objective, since religion was deemed to be subjective and scientifically untrustworthy. Aylwards Shorter and David Onyancha observe that:

*The first generations of African university students were taught to scoff at organised religion and at religious authority. In the history of human thought the “ages of faith” were ignored or dismissed, as being hopelessly flawed. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that African academics prided themselves on their unbelief, and that African undergraduates hastened to disprove the existence of God as soon as they arrived on campus.*²⁵

However, there are already chaplaincies and departments of Religious Studies in most universities of English speaking Africa. In general, however, the last quarter of the 20th century has witnessed a stronger religious presence at universities and institutions of higher learning, and with it, a certain erosion of academic unbelief. However, the emphasis of secularism has now shifted from unbelief to a religious indifferentism caused by consumer materialism, as we shall show in the next section.

Secularism as Consumer Materialism

Aylwards and Onyancha rightly observe that consumer materialism is nowadays the most common cause of secularism. Rather than formal unbelief, it is a religious indifferentism induced by the preoccupation with material things. Ordinarily, materialism refers to the ideology of emphasizing the material rather than the

²⁴ Aylward S. and Onyancha, E., *Secularism in Africa. A Case Study: Nairobi City*, p. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

spiritual side of the human person. It stresses material values with the assertion that money makes a person. To a materialist, all that matters in life is material possession such as money, food, drinks, cars houses etc. and the ability to acquire whatsoever they desires.²⁶ As Mary Douglas points out, materialism is the product of a world of impersonal things, a world in which personal relationships are at a minimum and in which symbolism and ritual are discounted as forms of expression in the interpretation of reality.²⁷ In a cosmos dominated by objects, rather than persons, it is impossible to bring moral pressure to bear on the human controllers, because there is so little person to person communication. Lesslie Newbigin goes even further in his interpretation of secularism. In his numerous writings on the subject he argues that materialism not only leads to religious indifference, but that it constitutes a real paganism.²⁸ In practice, it is nothing other than the worship of what is not God. It induces a pseudo-religious attitude towards the material and towards a material understanding of reality. Secularism banishes religious belief to the private sphere of subjective opinion and elevates popular science alone to the level of public truth.

Consumer materialism is the form of secularism most prevalent in the contemporary world, and the form which is rapidly appearing in Africa. It is the outcome of rapid technological change and is also strongly linked to wealth and the creation of wealth, since the affluent are the principal consumers. It is promoted by the electronic media.²⁹

Secularism at the Educational level (Case Study: Cameroon)

From the very on set, education in Cameroon was in the hands of the missionaries, who reserved an important place to the study of

²⁶ Chuta S. C., *Culture: Concept and Application for Normative Development*, Nsukka, University of Nigeria Press Ltd., 2004, p. 54.

²⁷ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1970, p. 61.

²⁸ See, for example, Leslie Newbigin: *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, WCC, Geneva, 1986 and *The Open Secret*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1981.

²⁹ Aylward S. and Onyanchae E., *Secularism in Africa. A Case Study: Nairobi City*, p. 22.

religion and the cultivation of the fear of God. These missionaries were very conscious of the fact that the quality of the society depended heavily on the quality of education received and that religious principles constituted one of those pillars necessary to direct the operations of society. This was reiterated by the 1963 *West Cameroon Education Policy* in the following words:

*Government believes that education is an investment in human material which can reap rich dividends. No policy for education can be relevant unless it takes into account all the economic, social, political and spiritual factors of our time and circumstances.*³⁰

The same West Cameroon government recognized and appreciated the role played by religious institutions in education and appreciated the fundamental influence of sound religious training in the formation of character. This is the text in full:

In speaking of the basic aims of education, it should not be overlooked that, in West Cameroon, the educational system has been carried out, with the express wish of the West Cameroon Government, mainly by the religious Voluntary Agencies. The idea has always been to produce an educated person of sound moral and religious background, and government reiterates its wish for the continuation of this end. Government wishes this section in the 1955 policy on education to be repeated – “Government appreciates the fundamental influence of sound religious training in the formation of character and it is our intention to see that religious instruction takes its rightful place in the curriculum of all schools.” In defining the term “religious instruction” Government emphasizes that this does not necessarily mean Christianity. It firmly holds to the belief that education should be open to all, irrespective of race, class, greed, colour, or religion.

In view of the policy to give religious instruction in all schools, the teaching of religion is undertaken in all West Cameroon educational institutions. This is not the case in Government institutions in East Cameroon. Government recommends that when Federal Government educational institutions are

³⁰ *West Cameroon Education Policy: Investment in Education*, Buea, 1963, West Cameroon Government Press, Buea, p. 2.

*introduced in West Cameroon, religious instruction should form a part of the curriculum.*³¹

Then came the process of secularization of the schools by which the government decided to take away the control of most schools from the missions, beginning from 1972. In the process of this government take-over of schools, it threw away religious studies and whatever has to do with God. Religious studies was on account of this secular out-look scrapped from the program of studies and various attempts to reinsert it were vehemently rejected by the powers that be. The final report on the National Forum on Education held in Yaoundé in May 1997 reads thus:

*The idea of religious education being introduced into Cameroon educational system raised a lot of dust and arguments came up again and again until the closing session. Advocates for this course argued very strongly that with the moral decadence gradually setting into our society, it was imperative to instil in our youths, through religious instruction the fear of God and love of the good But the chairperson as well as a good number of members of the committee evoked in very strong terms the secular nature of the state which should be applicable to schools.*³²

This attitude of secularizing education started in France in the 19th century. L. Rummel in his article *The Anti-Clerical Programme As a Disruptive Factor in the Solidarity of the Late French Republic* tells us that as far back as 1845, A. Munnier had argued that “since the state is laic, the instruction given in the name of the state ought to be laic.”³³ The wind of secularism that has penetrated into the Cameroonian society in the area of education came from France, the colonial master of the former East Cameroon.

³¹ *West Cameroon Education Policy: Investment in Education, 1963*, Buca, Published West Cameroon Government Press, p. 3.

³² M. Tumenta, *National Forum on Education, (Final Report)*, Yaoundé 22 – 27 May 1997, p. 17.

³³ L. Rummel, “The Anti-Clerical Programme as a Disruptive Factor in the Solidarity of the Late French Republic” in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1, April 1948, 9.

The effect of this secularization of education is that the dual purpose of education, corresponding to the double role which a person has to play in life, both as an individual and as a member of the society – the development of the whole personality of the individual and his sense of value – are here placed in jeopardy. As far back as 1973, W. Banboye lamented in an article *Correct Perspective in Education* about the weakness in Cameroon’s educational system:

*Thus the key to our educational system is knowledge and progress. But purposeful education must stretch out beyond the pursuit of mere knowledge and material progress. The sound development of moral character and ethical value does not, in my opinion, receive the due attention it should in our educational system.*³⁴

What Banboye calls “purposeful education” is education that is integral – education that caters for the intellectual, physical, psychological, moral and spiritual dimensions of the human being. The last two aspects are lacking from an educational system that focuses only on what Banboye calls “the pursuit of mere knowledge and material progress”.

Some African Cultural Values vis-a-vis Secularism

It is important at this stage to define two terms very briefly: Culture and Value.

The term culture admits several definitions. Here we shall mention a few. Culture is what makes humans different from animals. This is because of human being’s degree of adaptability and success. Every human group has adaptive skills that permit it to master its environment. For Charles Taylor, culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.”³⁵ Irukwu defines Culture as “the customary, social and

³⁴ W. Banboye, “Correct Perspective in Education” in *Cameroon Panorama*, January-February 1973, 18.

³⁵C. Taylor, *Culture and Civilization* quoted by Okoro, N., “Mass Communication and Culture in the Age of Globalization: Setting the Agenda for

religious structures and intellectual and artistic manifestations that characterize a particular society. It is, in effect, the civilization of a group of people at a given time such as their customs, attitude to arts, music, sports, crafts, recreation and to life generally.”³⁶ Culture is, therefore, the common heritage of a society or a people who share the same traditions. Culture is the capacity of every human group or a people to provide sustainable solutions to the basic human problems and the concrete and abstract outcomes of this process that become collectively owned and shared through time and space. That said for culture, let us turn to value.

Values are moral standards or principles which underlie the code of conduct of the members of any given society. Asogwa holds that they are principles or standards of a person or society for the good or benefit of the person or the society concerned.³⁷ Value can be intrinsic or extrinsic. A thing is said to have an intrinsic value when such a thing is of a worth in itself. Conversely, extrinsic value implies that a thing is not only of worth in itself but also a means of obtaining other values. Values can also be material or non-material. Therefore, value is a thing highly priced by a given society. It does not exist in isolation but in relation to culture. As stated above, values of a given society are a function of its culture.³⁸

Secularism and the Sense of the sacred and of religion

John S. Mbiti holds that in traditional African societies there are no atheists. This is because religion, in the indigenous African culture, is not an independent institution. It is an integral and inseparable part

Cultural Production and Meaning Contextualization” in O. Anichebe (ed.) *Issues in Nigerian Peoples and Culture* 9th ed., Nsukka, Afro-Orbis Publications Limited, 2009, pp. 187-213.

³⁶ Irukwu, J. O., *Nigeria at the Crossroads*, London, Witherby & CO. Ltd., 1983, p. 52.

³⁷ Asogwa, N. U., “Money-Consciousness and Economic Materialism in Nigeria: Reflections on a Peoples Values” in O. Anichebe (ed.) *Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence*, Nsukka, Afro-Orbis Publications Limited, 2008, pp. 171-195.

³⁸ Chinyere I Madukwe and H. N. Madukwe, “African Value Systems and the Impact of Westernization: A Critical Analysis” online at http://www.academicexcellencesociety.com/african_value_systems_and_the_impact_of_westernization.html (page consulted on 5th May 2014).

of the entire culture. Religion in the African sense is practical. This is because social morality is dependent on religion. Bolaji Idowu puts it this way, “morality is certainly the fruit of religion.” Any attempt to separate the two would be impossible “without disastrous consequences.”³⁹ All were interrelated in reality. The result of inseparability of religion from morality was that:

*The ancient Africa was far from being an abode of laissez-faire morality. There were strict moral principles and determined code of conduct. Custom laid down the code of law which established the nature of right-doings and custom established penalties and taboos against malefactors. Moral sanctions were mainly religious sanctions, and these metaphysical sanctions were truly effective.*⁴⁰

The sense of respect and the idea of the sacred filled the African as he approached religious elements and matters. Whereas not every philosophy is a religion, every religion is a philosophy of a type. In this case philosophy is an offspring of religion and a child that constantly returns to its mother. Religion protects philosophy within the community culture.

Secularism and the sense of community

Secularism has established an individualistic spirit in an African culture that was hitherto purely communal. There is an African proverb which says: “Go the way that many people go; if you go alone, you will have reason to lament.”⁴¹ The African idea of security and its value depends on personal identification with and within the community. Communalism in Africa is a system that is both suprasensible and material in its terms of reference. Both are found in a society that is believed by the Africans to be originally *god-made* because it transcends the people who live in it now, and it is *man-made* because it cannot be culturally understood independent of those who live in it now. Therefore, the authentic African is known and

³⁹ Idowu Bolaji, *God in Yoruba Belief*, London, 1962, p. 146.

⁴⁰ Okafor F.C., *Africa at Crossroads*, New York, 1974, p. 25.

⁴¹ Davidson B., *The African Genius*, Boston, 1969, P.31

identified in, by and through his community. Furthermore, African communalism connotes concern for human beings and their well-being. As an offshoot of extended family system where there is interconnectedness among the members of the community, there is care for one by all. There is the bearing of one another's burden and everyone is his brother's keeper. There is a mutual assistance for one another.⁴²

John S. Mbiti, for example, believes that the individual has little latitude for self-determination outside the context of the traditional African family and community. He writes:

*Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.*⁴³

South African philosopher, Professor Augustine Shutte, citing the Xhosa proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through persons), writes:

This (proverb) is the Xhosa expression of a notion that is common to all African languages and traditional cultures... (It) is concerned both with the peculiar interdependence of persons on others for the exercise, development and fulfilment of their powers that is recognised in African traditional thought, and also with the understanding of what it is to be a person that underlies this... In European philosophy of whatever kind, the self is always envisaged as something 'inside' a person, or at least as a kind of container of mental properties and powers. In African thought it is seen as 'outside,' subsisting in relationship to what is other, the natural and social environment. In fact the sharp distinction between self and world, a self that controls and changes the world and is in some sense 'above' it, this distinction so characteristic of

⁴² Chinyere I Madukwe and H. N. Madukwe,, "African Value Systems And The Impact Of Westernization: A Critical Analysis"

⁴³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New Hampshire, Heinemann, p. 109.

*European philosophy, disappears. Self and world are united and intermingle in a web of reciprocal relations.*⁴⁴

The individualistic tendencies evident on the continent are foreign; individualism is a product of the West. Chinyere Isaac Madukwe and H. N. Madukwe are of the opinion that the African communalism which was underlined by extended family system permeates every aspect of the life of an African. For them, this principle which presupposes equality for all and responsibility of all is being eroded by westernization and its attendant individualism. Looking at the situation during colonial rule they explain that with the creation of cities during that era, family members were separated and people were detached from their traditional, social and cultural settings. Consequently, parental authority and established marital conventions were weakened. Development of cities resulted in interaction of people from different ethnic groups, thus creating a heterogeneous society. Urbanization introduced fundamental changes to values applicable to its dwellers and more so gave rise to individualization of marital decisions because of dispersion of family members.⁴⁵

African Traditional Religion vis-à-vis Secularism

Mankind has always believed in the existence of a reality greater than the human being and this has helped to define and shape human culture, and has also acted as a solution to the fragility and obvious finality of human existence.⁴⁶ Africans are highly religious and this is evidenced in their social, economic, political and cultural life. Earlier on we brought in Mbiti who says that the African is notoriously religious. He continues in the same light when he says that African traditional religions “permeate all the aspects of the departments of life (of an African); there is no formal distinction between the sacred

⁴⁴ A Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa*, Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, Rondebosch 1993, 46-46.

⁴⁵ Chinyere I. Madukwe and H.N. Madukwe, “African Value Systems And The Impact Of Westernization: A Critical Analysis”

⁴⁶ Coogan M. D., “Introduction” in M. D. Coogan (ed.) *World Religions*, London, Duncan Baird Publishers, 2003, p. 6.

and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life.”⁴⁷ Hence Mbiti is right when he says that Africans are deeply religious. The attachment to and worship of God, form a dominating part of their world view. And this justifies our claim above that in Africa there are no atheists and consequently there can be no secularism. This is because all that the African does or says and permits are, in the words of Macaulay Kanu, “impregnated with a vision of the divine, and all natural reality is explainable in function of the supernatural. African social values rest on the moral values which in turn rest on religious values.”⁴⁸ He observes that many people find it perverse and perhaps sacrilegious to separate the moral and the religious values. This is because “it is the presence of religion that lends meaning and authority to values.” For him, religious or spiritual elements in the “African man characterizes our relation with the divine, with God and/or the gods. And it is an indubitable fact that this sense of religion is promotion of moral excellence.”⁴⁹

With colonization, however, the situation changed for the African. Western religion and education came and overshadowed African traditional religion thus paving the way for secularism. Colonization exposed Africans to Western religion and education. Through these media, western way of worship (particularly Christianity), which is fundamentally different from that of African worship system, was introduced. But although Christianity fights against secularism, it has been accused of promoting it. When one look at other world religions such as African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam (except in Turkey) and others, secularism does not exist within the societies where they are dominant. Yet, in those societies where Christianity is the dominant religion, secularism is rife⁵⁰ and from these one is tempted to think, with Pierpaolo

⁴⁷ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed., New Hampshire, Heinemann, 1990, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Macaulay Kano, “The Indispensability of the Basic Social Values in African Tradition: A Philosophical Appraisal,” online at <http://www.ve.org.za/index.php/VE/article/view/285/808> (page consulted on the 14th July 2014).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Confer to abstract of this article for some examples.

Antonello that secularism, and hence laicism, is, “in substance, produced by Christianity.”⁵¹ I do not, however, accept Marcel Gauchet’s view that Christianity is the “religion of the exit from religion”⁵² since this is ultimately false on several grounds. What is, nonetheless, clear is that modern democracy, the free market, civil rights, individual freedoms, “all have been, if not precisely invented in the absolute sense, ‘facilitated’ in their development and expression by the Christian cultures.”⁵³ Even Richard Rorty, whom Pierpaolo Antonello describes as a “philosopher allergic to the religious, has recently conceded this – though without attempting an explanation of the historical reasons.”⁵⁴

Going back to the discussion on the African predicament, we say that in order to propagate this new faith (Christianity) effectively, there was the need for Western education. Fortunately (from the point of view of literacy) and unfortunately (from the point of view of our cultural values) Africans in their quest for literacy sent their children to school with the implication of early exposure of their young ones to the influence of Western culture. These children are taught entirely new things touching all aspects of human existence. Incidentally, these teachings are openly advertised as opposite to African way of life which is considered barbaric in nature and must be jettisoned. Consequently, these young brains nurtured with western ways of life and thought could not but accept anything European as superior and better compared to anything African.⁵⁵ President Julius Nyerere was very clear and unequivocal when he levied his accusation on the colonialists: “Of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we had no indigenous culture of our own, or that what

⁵¹ Pierpaolo Antonello, “Introduction” in Pierpaolo Antonello (ed.) in *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 2.

⁵² Gauchet M., *The Disenchantment of the World*, Foreword Charles Taylor, Trans. Oscar Burge, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999.

⁵³ Pierpaolo Antonello, “Introduction,” p. 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Chinyere I. Madukwe and H. N. Madukwe, “African Value Systems and the Impact of Westernization: A Critical Analysis”

we did have was worthless or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of being a source of pride.”⁵⁶

Macaulay A Kanu expresses this sad reality as a crisis of culture caused by the West. For him, the West with the introduction of their educational system saw nothing of value in African culture. This led to crisis in our culture and value system. Crisis of a culture implies a process of development or degeneration introduced through a particular educational procedure. In the latter context, the West introduced an educational procedure which as a culture-transmitting process fashions out an attitude that neither respects the core values of our culture nor leads the younger members of the community to acquire the accumulated knowledge of the ‘folkways’ of their community with pride. The educational process directed their minds and thought away from home cultures; equipping them with a type of education that is antagonistic to the African cultural traits and thought patterns.⁵⁷ Writing in this direction Onwubiko says that the Western system of education was very well calculated to teach the new Africans that in order to rise in the ladder of the new culture and acquire the status it promised (*citizenship* in French colonies, for instance), they must be alienated, ideologically and physically, from their root – their cultural past. The colonial agents presented themselves as symbols of human beings, in the image and likeness of whom all future generation Africans were to be created.⁵⁸ The net result of this is the inferiority complex of dependency on foreign culture which is manifest in our unreflective and blind copy and introduction of alien values into our cultural milieu. This explains why young Africans are falling into atheism and embracing secularism easily which they borrow from abroad.

⁵⁶ Akinpelu, J.A. “Values in Nigerian Society” in *New Perspectives in Moral Education*. Otoni A. Ndubuka and E.O. Iheoma (Eds), Ibadan, Evans Brothers, Nigerian Publishers Ltd, 1983, p. 33.

⁵⁷ Macaulay A. Kanu, “The Indispensability of the Basic Social Values in African Tradition: A Philosophical Appraisal,” online at <http://www.ve.org.za/index.php/VE/article/view/285/808> (page consulted on the 14th July 2014).

⁵⁸ Onwubiko, O. A., *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, Enugu, Bigard Memorial Seminary, 1991, xi.

The Way Forward

In 1927, Sigmund Freud published his valediction to religion: *The Future of an Illusion*. Using the perspectives of psychoanalysis, Freud reduced religion to an illusion and opined that science would soon make religion unnecessary. Freud was among the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, a century that has achieved world changing advances in science. Yet, at the beginning of the 21st century, “religion has not only not disappeared or been reduced to insignificance; rather, it has become one of the most vigorous forces in contemporary geopolitics.”⁵⁹

Viewed the precarious situation of the African in the face of secularism, what can be done? I do not have a conclusive answer but ultimately I cannot advocate for a return to a pre-colonial Africa. That would not only be impossible but it would be sheer foolishness. It is therefore important for the African to realize and appreciate the necessity and strength of religion. Religion has the capacity to provide culture with an internally rooted self-critical, self-correcting capacity. It is religion’s role to present the possibility of self-transcendence to individuals and societies. In doing this, religion endows culture with an expanded cultural consciousness of what it means to be human, and thereby enhances the human enterprise of personal and social development.⁶⁰

The African should take the mean between the extreme of religiosity and the extreme of secularism. Rennick Paul, Stanley Cunningham and Ralph H. Johnson beautifully elaborate on each of these extremes. For them, when a society becomes *officially atheistic* and religion is legally and forcibly excised from the life of the culture there is a marked diminishment of human standards and of the value of human persons. In fact, there is a diminishment of productivity and prosperity on almost every level, save possibly for a few select projects or people. While the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics might be the most prominent example of this situation, it is not the only socio-political entity that has followed this route.

⁵⁹Rennick P. et al., (eds.), *The Future of Religion*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle 2010, p. ix.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. ix – x.

Those who have lived under such atheistic regimes speak, not simply of the diminishment of human development, but of its destruction.

Similarly, Rennick Paul, Stanley Cunningham and Ralph H. Johnson observe that when a society becomes *officially theistic or theocratic*, human, personal and social development are again diminished. In a theocracy, religion controls the culture rather than being a source of renewal or self-reflection within a culture. When this happens, the culture is narrowed down to a single, historically-conditioned perspective, which, it is said (by some demagogue), is God's perspective of what humanity ought to look like and how it ought to behave. And since the source for this perspective is religiously derived, it is perceived to have a sacred quality. This sacred quality imposes a supposedly divine imprint on, what is in fact, a limited, historically conditioned perspective. In a theocracy the culture rapidly fossilizes into rigid and righteously defined modes. We can see this in the Islamic Republic of Iran where the Supreme Leader is a cleric who is not elected but holds the authority that his title indicates. While there is a parallel democratic structure, with a President, Prime Minister, electoral processes etc., at its core, Iran is governed by Islam. Iran is not the only country that would call itself a Muslim state, and many of them are basically theocracies. It is important to remember, however, that there is nothing intrinsic to Islam that would make this the only model by which Moslems participate in the political realm.⁶¹

Therefore, only one solution is proposed: when religion neither dominates nor is dismissed, it gives voice to a dimension of humanity that summons the culture to foster increasingly the conditions for ever greater human dignity, freedom and creativity. For Piepaolo Antonello, the result of this would be a world driven by ethical principles according to which the rights and freedoms of every single individual have to be protected; in which all the world's victims are given succour and protection; and in which the separation of church and laic state is fully incorporated, nor just given by history but openly prescribed by Christian doctrine.⁶² Again, in the 20th century, the human rights movement is an example of how religion has

⁶¹ Rennick P. et al., (eds.), *The Future of Religion*, p. x.

⁶² Pierpaolo Antonelo, "Introduction," p. 9.

historically contributed to the development of the culture's understanding of what it is to be human. Historians agree that the civil rights movement for racial equality in the United States could not have succeeded without religion and the institutions that maintain the religious dimension.

Secularism is, therefore, a reality in Africa today yet Africans must not forget that religion constitutes a very important part of their cultural practices and as such part of their lives. A people without a culture is no people at all and since secularism has the effect of wiping out our cultures that are entirely linked to our African traditional religion, we must join in the fight against secularism, that is, desecularism.

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Secularism in the Post-Colonial Cameroon State: A Historical Critique

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Abstract

This paper critically analyses the functioning of the secular apparatus in Cameroon, and of the ways in which religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, Indigenous Religion, etc.) have responded to it. Secularism, a western construct, was adopted by the reunified Cameroon state in 1961 in the hope of keeping religion and state separate. As a de jure secular state, the government was expected to adopt policies capable of transforming Cameroon into a secular society marked by the replacement of religious ideas with secular ideas. Amazingly, as argued in this paper, this secular apparatus has largely remained a myth evidenced by the rather heightened influence of the religious traditions' specialist personnel: priests, pastors and traditional rulers (Chief Priests of Indigenous religion) on the secular society. To put it another way, the Government and Religion have interacted in ways that breach the secular apparatus provided by the constitution. In this perspective, this paper assesses the constitutionality of government accommodation of religion in Cameroon.

Introduction

The secular society is not only a product of internal forces occurring over time within religious traditions, but also an outcome of the wider social context. Secularists have traced the roots of secularism to early enlightenment when God was rejected as the absolute reference point.¹ This was what inaugurated the gradual elimination of religion, especially Christianity from its position of a unified social order and pushed it to the private sphere. According to

¹ David Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2003.

some religionists, this shift which found expression first in the Western political sphere before being exported to other parts of the world was partly fed by the emergence of an anti-Christian culture.² The latter emerged from a context of people's reaction to the shortcomings of organized religion which provided the potential for the rise of a secular culture in Europe. This separation of state and religion which rested on the elimination of religion from public life was what made sectors of Western society and culture to be freed from the decisive influence of religious ideas and institutions. Put differently, the societies that became secular were expected to witness the displacement of religion's influence in the central areas of modern society alongside the marginalization of its ideas and institutions. As Hurd argues, "Secularism is the dominant language of religion and politics in the west."³ Secularism is broadly defined as the separation of organized religion from organized political power inspired by a specific set of values.⁴

The colonial enterprise that was peddled by Western powers that had embraced the philosophy of secularism initiated the gradual secularization of their spheres of influence. It was in this atmosphere that non-western societies inherited secularism from their western colonialists.⁵ In Latin America, Asia and Africa, the secular state system was adopted by some countries that emerged from the colonial mould. Zeidan confirms this by observing that western secularism gained roots in other parts of the world through its imposition of modernism through a process marked by the deconstruction of old certainties.⁶

In Africa like elsewhere in the world, the secular western culture entrenched with significant ramifications. According to Moyo, there

² Jeffreys K. Hadden & Anson Shupe, eds., *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered: Religion and the Political Order*, Volume III, New York, Paragon House, 1989.

³ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "The Political Authority of Secularism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, 10, No. 2, (2004), pp. 235-262.

⁴ Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," in *The Future of Secularism*, ed. Srinivasan, T. N., Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 20-53.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion*, p. 36.

are 21 constitutionally secular states in Africa.⁷ Many scholars of religion have attributed the rise and persistence of religious fundamentalism to the emergence and spread of secularism. This is because secularism was forcefully planted in these societies by imperialism and colonialism and amounted to great disruptions whose consequences are yet to give way. This explains why contemporary Islamists across Africa see secularism as foreign ideology opposed to Islam. It is in this context that the ongoing anti-secularist war by Islamists in Egypt, Nigeria, Somalia, Mali, Algeria and Niger should be understood. In these countries, Islamists attribute the breakdown of moral values, materialism, and the separation of religion from politics and public life to the imposed western secularism. It should also be noted that Christian fundamentalists in various parts of the world, especially in Ireland have attacked the secular apparatus on similar grounds and are struggling to bring back religion into public life.⁸ It can therefore be argued that both Islamic and Christian fundamentalists reject secularism on similar grounds.

In modern Cameroon which Fombad describes as a highly complex heterogeneous nation with a wide diversity of religions, just like in the United States and elsewhere, the separation of state and religion has always hinged on the religion clauses of its successive constitutions (1961, 1972 and 1996). According to these constitutional provisions, the state is prohibited from preventing a person's practice of a particular religion and is not allowed to favour any religion. The preamble of the 1996 Constitution states in part: "The state shall be secular. The neutrality and independence of the State in respect of all religions shall be guaranteed."⁹ This constitutionally established freedom of choice on religious matters and the *de jure* certainty of success or failure on the persuasive merit of religions notwithstanding, the post-colonial Cameroon state and the religions within it had to remain independent of each other. Based

⁷ Derrick Brown Moyo, "A Critical Analysis of Secularism on Individual Eschatology: Contextual Implications for Christians in Modern Zambia," Masters Thesis in Theology, South African Theological Seminary, 2010, p. 118.

⁸ Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion*, p. 104.

⁹ This constitution came into existence in accordance to Law No. 96-06 of January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972.

on this strong constitutional language, the separation of religion and state is supposed to be absolute; where no Catholic prelate, Protestant minister, Imam of the Islamic faith and Chief Priest of Traditional Religion is permitted to tell the president (should he be a practitioner of his religion) how to act; where religious ministers are not allowed to influence the political affiliation and voting choices of their followers; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference, and where the government in power does not lean on any religion for consolidation.

However, the persistent interaction between religion and the successive post-colonial governments, together with some politicians' use of religion to further their own ends, inhibits Cameroon's constitutional right to secularism. In numerous instances, the separation of religion and state has been violated. Indeed, the state has funded mission schools, declared religious feasts as public holidays, unconstitutionally meddled in the affairs of religions, and welcomed prayers in public schools. These practices transgressed the successive constitutions of Cameroon including that of 1996 since they established a wall of separation between state and religion. Besides, some Islamic and Traditional religious leaders have used their positions as Imams and Chief Priests to further their political ends. Further, efforts by some religious traditions to play a role in the political well-being of people have often placed them at daggers drawn with the state. This is the context in which the state has by way of regulation and accommodation attempted to limit the influence of religion in politics. Ahidjo's open brutality against religious leaders was what stalled their involvement in political issues. But following Cameroonians' clamour for multipartism in the early 1990s, religious leaders took advantage of the political and social liberalization accruing from the process to influence political issues. Since then, religion has gained strength in the political landscape of the country in spite the *de jure* secular principle.¹⁰ Thus, there has been

¹⁰ For more on this illegal intertwining between religion and state in Cameroon, read Hamadou Adama, "Islam and State in North Cameroon: Between Tension and Accommodation," In *Local Practices, Global Controversies: Islam in Sub-Saharan African Contexts*, ed. Kamari Maxine Clarke, Yale, The MacMillan Centre, 2006), www.yale.edu/macmillan, Accessed on November 24, 2013, 47. Read also Akoko, Robert Mbe, "*Ask and You Shall be Given*": *Pentecostalism and the Economic*

a dichotomy between the theoretical and practical constitutional provisions on secularism.

As a stalled principle in crisis, an evaluative study on secularism in Cameroon remains a dire necessity. This need is also underpinned by the imminence of a spillover of Boko Haram anti-secularist and terrorist activities into Cameroon. Considering the repeated kidnapping of foreigners in Northern Cameroon by militants of this Nigerian-based terrorist movement, the Cameroon Government needs to bother about the purpose and value of its secular principle. This paper is therefore an assessment of the degree at which the successive Ahidjo and Biya regimes respected this *de jure* secular principle. The study argues that in spite the constitutionally enshrined secularism, intertwining in matters of religion and politics has grown in the post-colonial Cameroon state. Simply put, the Cameroonian secular structure has functioned in ways marked by significant departures from the clear separation between religion and state. Following a brief introduction to Cameroon's religious landscape, I examine secularism under the two successive regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo (1961-1982) and Paul Biya (since 1982).

Theoretical Frame of Analysis

This study on the secular system in Cameroon is grounded on and shaped by the broad sweeping theory of secularization, which, in turn, is nested in an even broader theory of modernization. Hadden notes that the theory of modernization is concerned with the transformation of human societies from simple to complex entities.¹¹ For him therefore, the debates about secularism stem from the modernization theory since it provides a basis for an analysis of modern society. The secularization theory on its part argues that religion has to be relegated to the private realm in this modern

Crisis in Cameroon, African Studies Collection Series, Leiden, African Studies Centre, 2007.

¹¹ Jeffreys K. Hadden, "Desacralizing Secularization Theory," in *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered: Religion and the Political Order*, eds. Hadden, K. Jeffreys & Shupe, Anson, Volume III, New York, Paragon House, 1989, p. 3.

society. Hence, secularists link the decline of religion with the process of modernization.¹²

Dobbelaere argues that secularization resulted from the process of functional differentiation, which has produced internal societal subsystems.¹³ This is indicative that secularization thrives only in those societies in which a process of differentiation has already set in to segregate several institutional domains, for example, the political from the religious. Amazingly, some societies including Cameroon borrowed the secular apparatus irrespective of the fact that the process of functional differentiation had not gained roots. This is partly what has checked secularism in Cameroon since it was instituted at a time when the process of differentiation was yet to establish a boundary between politics and religion. I am therefore in agreement with Dobbelaere and Wentworth that the general process underlying secularization is either checked or fostered by the degree of functional differentiation in the area. So this critical study on secularism in Cameroon draws its analysis partly from the functional differentiation model. From the explanations of the disciples of this school, it is clear that the Cameroon secular apparatus was adopted at a time when the forces of modernization had not produced a wall separating the political and the religious. I have argued elsewhere that it is probable that the Cameroon Government opted for secularism without a proper appreciation of what it meant.¹⁴ Worse still, the government has not shown any commitment towards secularizing the country. As we shall discuss later in this paper, the government in some specific situations shelved the secular state apparatus by extending an aura of unconstitutional favours to some religions, especially Christianity and Islam. Consequently, the state and the faiths she favoured became obstacles in the path of secularism.

¹² Larry Schiner, "The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, No. 6 (1967).

¹³ Karel Dobbelaere, "Secularization Theories and Sociological Paradigms: Convergences and Divergences," *Social Compass*, 31 (1984).

¹⁴ Michael Kpughe Lang, "Mainline Christian Churches as Obstacles in the Path of Religious Pluralism in Cameroon since Reunification," International Symposium Proceedings on *Religious Pluralism in Global Perspective*, (Hosted by the University of California Santa Barbara Religious Studies Department and Funded by the US State Department), In-House Publication of the University of California Santa Barbara, August 2013, 159-170.

The increasing strength of religion in politics pushed some scholars to bring to the limelight the desecularization world theory. Berger, an exponent of this school, argues that the world is not secularized anymore since religion has reasserted its presence in public debate.¹⁵ Habermas, a post-secularist, contends that secularism may have come to an end.¹⁶ For him, we are now living in a post-secular society marked by the significant presence of religion in the public space. Habermas sees the post-secular society as a product of multiculturalism which permits the co-existence of many religions in a given society. Cameroon is an interesting example of a multi-religious society characterized by a heightening influence of religion in the public realm. Hence, the postulations of Berger and Habermas could be likened to Cameroon where the basic principles of secularism have always been violated by the state and the various religious traditions. Since the adoption of the secular policy in 1961, religion has gradually reasserted its presence in the public space, an indication that desecularization is entrenching with the potential to result in a post-secular society. In fact, Cameroonian secularism has failed to establish a principled distance between religion and state. There are evidences attesting to the fact that the Government of Cameroon has hardly shown interest in foregrounding the purpose of secularism. Presently, it seems that the government has lost sight of the underlying purpose and *modus operandi* of this colonially inherited practice. Thus, this study builds on the functional differentiation theory and the desecularization model to critically assess the implementation of the secular state system in Cameroon since independence.

Cameroon's Religious Landscape: A Sketch Presentation

Religionists will certainly conclude in agreement with my postulation that Cameroon, since its crafting by the Germans in the

¹⁵ P. L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Berger, P. L., (Michigan, Washington Grand Rapids, 1998, pp. 1-18.

¹⁶J. Habermas, "On the Relations between the Secular Liberal State and Religion," In *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, eds. H. de Vries & Lawrence, S., New York, Fordham University Press, 2006, pp. 251-260.

last quarter of the nineteenth century, has evolved into a highly religious country. Long before the colonial encounter, the population of the area that later became known as Cameroon was a blend of numerous ethnic entities, whose indigenous religions differed significantly. Each ethnic group had its indigenous religion whose observance was almost communal and absolute. But indigenous religions had cross-cutting features: prayer, rituals, sacrifice and the belief in a Supreme Being whose appellation was as varied as the ethnic groups. These religious practices and beliefs permeated all areas of life.

The imposition of Islam in the northern region of the would be Cameroon in the first half of the nineteenth century through an Islamic revolution resulted in shifts in religious boundaries. This was the event that launched Islam's ascendancy in the present day northern region of Cameroon. The major disturbing issue that accrued from this forceful Islamization was the decline of the Indigenous Religion it initiated. For the first time, as I have argued elsewhere, the people in the region were divided between followers of indigenous religions and Islam.¹⁷ But this boundary enjoyed existence only during the first half of the nineteenth century. In fact, a new boundary shift emerged in the 1840s when Western Christian missionary societies began Christianizing the southern region of the would-be Cameroonian territory. Prior to this move, the area had been a preserve of indigenous religions. So as Islam and Christianity advanced southwards and northwards respectively, especially when the territory was colonized by Germany in 1884, the population of the followers of indigenous religions further declined in both regions. Gradually, the Cameroon religious landscape was shaped into what Adama labels as Christian South and Muslim North.¹⁸ But before the termination of the Western colonial enterprise in Cameroon¹⁹, these foreign religions were no longer restricted to these geographical

¹⁷ Lang, "Mainline Christian Churches," p. 161.

¹⁸ Adama, "Islam and State in North Cameroon," p. 47.

¹⁹ Initially annexed and governed by Germany (between 1884 and 1916), Cameroon was eventually partitioned and placed under Britain and France first as mandates of the League of Nations and later as trust territories of the United Nations. In October 1961, the southern portion of British Cameroon reunified with the French section to constitute the modern Cameroon state.

zones. As a matter of fact, the expansionist desires of Muslim clerics and Christian missionaries culminated in the planting of Christianity in the North and Islam in the south. This underscores the inappropriateness of the Christian South-Muslim North paradigm as the country becomes more multireligious.

The parochial nature that characterized the Christian tradition is worth highlighting. During the colonial period, the sole Christian traditions were Catholicism and Protestantism that were largely established along regional and ethnic walls. While Catholic missionary boards in both French and British Cameroon produced the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) of Cameroon following reunification in 1961, the Protestant missionary societies carved out opposing Protestant traditions: Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists.²⁰ Since independence, as Akoko confirms, Protestantism just like elsewhere has witnessed ideological shifts.²¹ Indeed, Pentecostal churches have emerged and are increasingly challenging the Catholic and Mainstream Protestant hegemony in the religious sphere.²² According to Akoko, the economic crisis was what enabled Pentecostalism to have an imprint in Cameroon.²³ Before the economic crisis, the only Pentecostal churches in Cameroon were the Full Gospel Mission and Apostolic Church. Presently, as Akoko observes, there are more than eighty of such churches in Cameroon. There is therefore a high possibility that many Catholics and Mainline Protestants have shifted loyalties to Pentecostal Protestantism.

Of course, faith traditions other than Muslim, Christian and Indigenous Religion are further diversifying the religious landscape. The ongoing planting of Mormonism, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism especially in major cities has widened the religious landscape. What certainly accounts for this development are the religious freedom clauses enacted in the successive constitutions of

²⁰ Jean-Paul Messina & Jaap Slageren, *Histoire du Christianisme au Cameroun: Des Origines à Nos Jours*, Paris et Yaoundé, Editions Karthala et Editions Clé, 2005.

²¹ Akoko, "Ask and You Shall be Given": *Pentecostalism*.

²² John W. Forge, "Review of Akoko, Robert Mbe's "Ask and You Shall be Given": *Pentecostalism and the Economic Crisis in Cameroon*," H-Pentecostalism, H-Net Reviews, March 2009, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23129> (Accessed on July 14, 2013), 1.

²³ Akoko, "Ask and You Shall be Given," 192.

the country. But many Cameroonians are yet to come to terms with the presence of these new faiths. Whatever, Cameroon has become more multireligious even though the country is still predominantly Christian (69 percent). The latter is divided between Catholics (38 percent), mainstream Protestants (26 percent) and Pentecostals (4 percent). The Muslims represent 21 percent, followers of indigenous religions, arguably, 5 percent²⁴, while the recently introduced faiths represent only four percent of the total population. These are the religious traditions that Cameroon's legislated secular system intends to separate from the state.

The Cameroon Secular System: An Interpretation

During the reunification constitutional talks in 1961, secularism was adopted and introduced in the 1961 Federal Constitution of Cameroon.²⁵ This seemingly ambiguous system of separation of State and religion was inherited from the country's former colonial powers, Adama believes, in the hope of rendering the new state functional. But the manner in which this imported structure has functioned leaves one with the impression that its purpose, meaning and operation mechanism were not clearly defined from the beginning. This explains why this section attempts to interpret this legislated secular state system. In article 1 of the 1961 Federal Constitution, secularism was legislated in part as follows: "The Federal Republic of Cameroon shall be democratic, secular and dedicated to social service." It is important to analyse the meaning of the word "secular" in the early constitutional history of Cameroon. Was the word introduced in this constitution to mean the blanket exclusion of religion from the state? Earnestly, it is extremely difficult to retrieve the meaning that was attached to this secular state system. But there is a strong possibility that secularism in Cameroon was conceived to

²⁴ Despite the fact that Christianity and Islam have been successful in gaining converts in Cameroon, many Christians and Muslims, even including those who are devout, continue to observe some aspects of Traditional Religion (Mbaku 2005). This explains why the demographic repartition of Cameroons religious landscape remains irrefutably faulty. Some scholars of religion have even argued that Africans who follow the foreign religions all practice Traditional Religion.

²⁵ Adama, "Islam and State," 52.

mean the strict separation of religion and the state. This was the manner in which western states including France interpreted secularism.²⁶ And it is irrefutable that French legal experts were instrumental in the drafting of the 1961 Constitution.²⁷ It is therefore probable that Cameroon conceived secularism as the strict separation of religion and state simply because it was part of French administrative tradition.

Amazingly, the secular French state permitted her missionary societies, especially Catholic ones, to come on board political issues in Cameroon just like in the rest of her African colonies. Adama observes how the French seduced Muslim leaders in French Cameroon in the hope of associating them with the colonial exploitative machinery.²⁸ This religionist has also exposed how the French were consistent in physically or politically eliminating Muslim rulers who denied any collaboration with them. As an inherited structure, therefore, secularism could not function in post-colonial Cameroon in a manner different from the religion - state relations of the French colonial era. The total separation of state and religion that was introduced in the 1961 Constitution, perhaps, was not fully grasped by the political leaders. It is probable that Ahidjo opted for the system in the hope of using it to attain personal goals. As we shall discuss later, Ahidjo exploited the secular apparatus to silence religious authorities that were against his matchless authoritarian and dictatorial regime. Interestingly enough, Bhargava has observed that some political rulers may opt for secularism for the sake of maximizing their own power. For this Indian secularist, states that

²⁶Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness". In 1905, France through a secularism bill proclaimed the principle of separation between state and religion. It is obvious that French meddling in the affairs of her colonies resulted in the constitutional proclamation of separation between state and religion. This constitutional secular rule is the same in almost all former French colonies: Mali, Niger, Senegal, Mauritania, etc.

²⁷ Anthony Ndi observes that French legal experts such as Jacques Rousseau and Maurice Duveger were instrumental in drafting the French Cameroon and Federal Republic of Cameroon constitutions. Perhaps, they simply introduced the secular framework into the latter without explaining its content to Ahidjo who brought them on board. Read Anthony Ndi, *Southern West Cameroon Revisited 1950-1972: Unveiling Inescapable Traps*, Vol. One, Bamenda, Paul's Press, 2013, p. 153.

²⁸ Adama, "Islam and State".

become secular on these grounds are characterized by autocratic rule. Throughout Ahidjo's stay in power, he led a matchless dictatorial government which liked manipulating religions in its own interest. Perhaps, secularism is in crisis today not only because its adoption hinged on egoistic concerns, but also due to the fact that it was not embedded wholly in the local Cameroonian context. For me, it was/is a western idea on Cameroonian soil.

Besides, it is relevant to bear in mind that although secularism was imported from former colonial masters and possibly adopted on the basis of meeting personal goals, its enactment in the constitution was, arguably, a consensual decision arrived at during the Foumban Constitutional Conference. The circumstances, purposes and context notwithstanding, what is obvious about the secular state system in Cameroon is that it proclaimed the strict separation between state and religion. The 1972 Constitution which also proclaimed the secular characters of the state was adopted directly by Cameroonians through a referendum. Even the democratic constitution of 1996 which accrued from the demand for multiparty governance still established a wall of separation between religion and state. This constitution in terms of secularism states the following: "The State shall be secular. The neutrality and independence of the state in respect of all religions shall be guaranteed." Constitutionally, therefore, the different faiths in the Cameroon religious landscape are expected to be extricated from the secular realm. Evidently, the establishment of a wall of separation between state and religion in the example of France and other western countries is what emerges from a reading of the 1961, 1972 and 1996 constitutions. This hinges on the reality that the secular clauses of these constitutions legislate secularism without stipulating the nature and degree of involvement between government and religion. It is therefore relevant to observe that this mutual exclusion of religion and state as a defining feature of Cameroonian secularism recognizes the unique nature of religious entities, a nature that prohibits their being treated like other voluntary associations that may enjoy government's assistance and incur its regulation. Thus, the reciprocal separation of state and religion is what emerges from the interpretation of the secular clauses of Cameroon's constitutions. But the question to be answered is: To

what extent has this legislated separation of religion from state been followed in practical terms in the modern Cameroon society? In the following sections, the application of the secular state apparatus under the successive regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya is evaluated.

An Appraisal of Secularism under the Ahidjo Regime (1961-1982)

The secular state system which was adopted and enacted in the 1961 Federal Constitution was seldom respected under the Ahidjo regime. The attitude of the government as well as some religious leaders diametrically defied and contradicted the fundamental concept, vision and spirit for which the secular state system was proclaimed. The wall of separation between religion and state remained on paper as it was mutually violated by both camps in the hope of safeguarding their specific interests. This was probably because the Ahidjo regime was born under conditions of political upheaval since the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) launched guerrilla warfare against the Ahidjo Government. It was in an attempt to pacify the country that Ahidjo involved in anti-secularism practices. Religious authorities of the Christian faith were seen by the regime as persons who were fuelling the political unrest in which the government was trapped. This was the context in which Ahidjo promulgated a decree in March 1962 prohibiting Cameroonians from making any statements that could endanger his regime. This was a kind of reminder to churches of the secular structure that confined religion to the private sphere. The arrest and prosecution of Bishop Ndongmo at the turn of the sixties resulted from the implementation of this law in ways that contradicted the secular system.

After his appointment as Bishop of Nkongsamba in 1964 at a time when Ahidjo's power was heavily contested by UPCists, the Bishop was accused of intruding in politics by supporting the anti-government fighters. The Ahidjo regime maintained that Ndongmo had sided with the rebels by preaching against the government brutal

repression of the local people.²⁹ After probably interpreting these events in the light of the separation between state and religion, the Ahidjo regime ordered the arrest of Ndongmo. The latter was prosecuted in a military court amounting to his conviction of treason and given a death sentence. It was due to international pressure from France and the Vatican that the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment. The Bishop spent five years in the Tchollire Prison after which he was pardoned by the president. This event served as a deterrent to other religious leaders who were critical of the Ahidjo regime. Certainly, Ahidjo did not order the arrest and prosecution of the Bishop because he wanted to implement the secular rule. He did so only in an attempt to consolidate his authority which was under heavy threat. This can be likened to Bhargava's postulation that some political rulers may opt for secularism for the sake of maximizing their own power. I earlier argued that Ahidjo led a matchless dictatorial government which liked subjugating religions in its own interest.

Still during these early years of Ahidjo's rule especially when he was struggling to consolidate his power by calling for the creation of a single party regime, Christian churches disregarded the wall of separation between religion and state by condemning the brute force employed by the regime to realize the project. Besides, Monsignor Jean Zoa of the Catholic Church hardened his criticisms against the regime following the death of political prisoners in 1962 while being transferred to Yaoundé.³⁰ Considering that the Catholic newspaper carried the criticisms of the Bishop against the regime, the French editor-in-chief of the paper, Father Fertin, was forced to leave the country. Overall, Protestant and Catholic leaders were perturbed about the speed at which the country was evolving towards an injurious dictatorship characterized by what Bayart labels as "the personalization of power."³¹

²⁹ Akoko, "Ask and You Shall be Given," p. 189.

³⁰ J. F. Bayart, "The Birth of the Ahidjo Regime," In *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadu Ahidjo*, ed. Richard Joseph, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978), 63.

³¹ Ibid.

Another anti-secular development worth exposing was government policy. There existed areas where government policies appeared to favour or mar religion. Examples include the policies of generosity towards Islam and prohibition towards Christian religious traditions in the northern part of the country. As Adama notes, “The activities of a number of Christian churches, notably evangelization campaigns were reduced to a minimum.”³² Bayart seemingly supports this view by recalling that Muslims of the northern region usually identified the southern Christian populations with the UPC.³³ This is the context in which Ahidjo’s stalling of the Christianization of the northern region should be placed. By constraining the evangelization of Christian traditions in this Islam-dominated region, the Ahidjo regime had shelved constitutional provisions relating to religious freedom and state secularism. As regards the policy of generosity towards Islam, the regime extended a plethora of favours to Islam. One of such favours was the state’s creation of Islamic religious associations. In 1963, according to Adama, Ahidjo signed a decree creating the *Association Culturelle Islamique du Cameroun* (ACIC).³⁴ Its mission was to run central mosques and to organize a nationwide Islamic educational system. By creating and funding such a body, Ahidjo had breached the total separation of religion and state. A similar anti-secular move was undertaken as regards Protestantism in Cameroon when Ahidjo supported the creation of the *Federation des Eglises et les Missions Evangeliques du Cameroun* (FEMEC) in 1969. According to Akoko, the move was triggered by the governments desire to deal with one Protestant body rather than with many.³⁵ It is important to note that most UPC leaders and militants were Protestants who had refused to legitimize the Ahidjo regime. Thus, Ahidjo’s support for the creation of FEMEC was not intended to aid Protestant churches, but to contain them. To these favours should be added the anti-secular recognition of Islamic celebrations (Ramadan and Pilgrimage) and Christian feasts (Ascension, Christmas and Good Friday) as public holidays. This caused all public

³² Adama, “Islam and State,” p. 55.

³³ Bayart, “The Birth of the Ahidjo Regime,” p. 51.

³⁴ Adama, “Islam and State,” 54.

³⁵ Akoko, “*Ask and You Shall be Given*,” p. 191.

services to be closed during these feasts thereby establishing an undeniable connection between state and religion.³⁶ Besides, the celebrations of other religions especially traditional religions were/are not observed as public holidays. Evidently, the Ahidjo regime was not neutral and independent in respect of all religions.

The harmonious relationship traditional rulers enjoyed with the Ahidjo regime defied the principle of secularism. During the colonial period, traditional rulers were co-opted by the colonial government, especially in British Cameroon. And following the reunification of Cameroon, these chiefs were constitutionally co-opted into the political structures of the state. According to article 38 (2) of the 1961 Constitution, the West Cameroon House of Chiefs (WCHC) was created as an arm of the Federated State of West Cameroon. The WCHC permitted traditional rulers to directly participate in modern politics in addition to the roles they were assigned in the judiciary. Besides this house of chiefs, the Ahidjo regime generally counted on the support of traditional rulers to surmount political hurdles. This explains why Samah describes the period of the federation (1961-1972) as the “golden age of traditional rulers in Cameroon.”³⁷ Although this participation of traditional rulers in politics was enshrined in the constitution, I argue that it violated the secular state system. This is because leadership in traditional Africa which is the preserve of traditional rulers is primarily sacral and religious.³⁸ According to scholars of African Traditional Religion, the institution of traditional ruler is basically that of Chief High Priest.³⁹ Drawing examples from Cameroon, Tatah shows how traditional rulers are high priests by observing that they are spiritual leaders who serve as

³⁶ Lang, “Mainline Christian Churches”.

³⁷ Walters Samah, “Chiefs (Traditional Rulers) in Anglophone Cameroon and Modern Governance 1961-2000,” PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaoundé I, 2006, p. 119.

³⁸ Mbuy Tata, “The Status and Dignity of the Fon in the North West Region of Cameroon: A Critical Approach in the Anthropology of Religion,” Paper Presented in Bamenda on 7 November 2013, p. 1.

³⁹ Read J. K. Olupona, “Rituals in African Traditional Religion: A Phenomenological Perspective,” *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 40, no. 2 (1990), 11-32; Michael A. Gomez, “Africans, Religion, and African Religion through the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African Religions*, 1, no. 1 (2013), 78-90.

intermediaries between the living and the “living dead”.⁴⁰ I am in agreement with these religionists that the institution of a traditional ruler is divinely religious. Thus, traditional rulers whose spiritual powers emanate from ancestral spirits are charged with divine office marked by the performance of various religious roles (prayer, sacrifice and ritual) on behalf of the entire community.

In the legislated secular Cameroon state, therefore, these High Chief Priests of Traditional Religion are not supposed to meddle in politics. By legislating secularism and the participation of traditional rulers in politics, the 1961 Constitution was contradictory. The existence of the WCHC made it impossible for traditional rulers to serve in accordance with the religious principle of neutrality. The traditional rulers began participating in divisive politics. In fact, Ahidjo exploited this constitutional ambiguity by enlisting the support of traditional rulers in the hope of consolidating his power. Gradually therefore, Ahidjo transformed traditional rulers into auxiliaries and collaborators of government.⁴¹ Amazingly, this practice persisted after the abolishment of the WCHC in 1972. Later in 1977, the Ahidjo-led regime passed a law which subordinated traditional rulers to government-appointed local administrative officers.⁴² This further made traditional rulers to be seen as natural partners to the regime. Generally, the harmonious relationship between traditional rulers and the Ahidjo regime contradicted the secular status of the state. This is due to the fact that traditional rulers, especially those of the Western Grassfields, are not individuals, but institutions that are solidly built in the traditional religions of the ethnic groups. Throughout the Ahidjo era, therefore, the wall of separation between religion and state was scarcely respected. The regime and the various religious faiths interacted in ways that were contrary to the imported secular state system. Indeed, Ahidjo resigned in 1982 at a time when the tradition of violating the secular system had entrenched in the Cameroonian society. No wonder his

⁴⁰ Mbuy 'Tatah, *The Faith of Our Ancestors: New Perspectives in the Study and Understanding of African Traditional Religion*, Bamenda, Archdiocesan Print Media, 2012.

⁴¹ Samah, “Chiefs (Traditional Rulers) in Anglophone Cameroon”.

⁴² Ibid, p. 281.

constitutional successor, Paul Biya, bowed to this policy of pulling down the wall of separation between religion and the state.

Secularism under the Biya Regime (1982-to Present)

The Biya regime has been grappling with the issue of state-religion separation since 1982. The engulfing of the country by an economic crisis and the request for multiparty governance were events that made it difficult not only for religions to remain in the private realm but for the state to keep its neutrality and independence of any religion. So the Biya regime, I argue, has been characterized by excessive entanglements between state and religion. Indeed, the three decades of the Biya regime have been marked by the mutual violation of the secular clause in myriad of ways. Our assessment of secularism from 1982 to the present focuses on aspects such as state aid to religious faiths, the exercise of religion in public schools and the nexus between religion and politics.

The regime of Paul Biya has been marked by various forms of government support to religious faiths, specifically in the domain of financial assistance and policies that appear to favour religion. Generally, government aid to religious traditions, no matter the form it takes, is constitutionally impermissible. It is a breach of the state neutrality principle enshrined in the secular clause of the 1996 Constitution. This clause prevents government support to religion. The state funding of religious schools is an illegal practice that the Biya regime inherited from the Ahidjo-led government. This has been fed by the heavy involvement of religious faiths in education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The state provides financial assistance to religious schools operated by Catholic and Protestant faiths. Legally, therefore, individuals can object in principle to paying taxes into state revenues when a part of those funds go to support religious schools. It is relevant to note that religious schools are set up in part to ensure a Christian education for Christian children. Similarly, religious traditions are not supposed to pay taxes into state revenues. Dobbelaere describes this attitude towards education as the establishment of religious polarised structures to protect followers of

religions from the secular ideology.⁴³ Amazingly, state financial aid (from the national budget) to such religious schools which is a violation of the secular clause of the 1996 Constitution has remained uncorrected, perhaps, because it has not been sued by anyone. Yet the role of the civil courts is to prevent such illegal entanglements between state and religion.

Under government policy, areas where government policies appear to violate the principle of neutrality inherent in the secular clause include: the practice of religion in public schools, signing of accords with religious Non-Governmental Organisations, the recognition of religious feasts and public holidays and the co-opting of religious leaders in the ruling party. As regards the practice of religion in public schools, the state permits its property to be used for the advancement of religion. This takes the form of prayers, reading of religious texts (Bible and Koran) and the teaching of religious studies by religious authorities. These are practices that violate the secular clauses of the constitution since they assign to the state sectarian duties of propagating and inculcating the beliefs of particular religions. In the United States of America, Bible reading in public schools was prohibited in 1963 because it violated the Establishment Clause of the country's constitution.⁴⁴ In Cameroon, there is a myriad of arrangements designed to foster prayer or religion in public schools, including the daily reading from the Bible, the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the convening of evangelization campaigns. During the written part of the November 2013 entrance into the Higher Teacher Training College of the University of Bamenda, the Chief Invigilator of the hall to which I was assigned ordered candidates to pray after observing that "I know everybody in this hall is a Christian." This was not only a breach of state neutrality but might have assaulted the non-Christians who were in the hall.

Another sphere in which the Government of Paul Biya works in complicity with religion (Christianity specifically) which encourages

⁴³ Dobbelaere, "Secularization Theories," p. 31.

⁴⁴ Carl H. Esbeck, "The Establishment Clause: Assuring the Independence of Churches and a Neutral State," in *Government Intervention in Religious Affairs, II*, ed., Kelley, M. Dean, New York, The Pilgrim Press, 1986, p. 47.

the infiltration of a religious agenda into the policies of the legislated secular state is its support of the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages by the *Société Internationale de Linguistique* (SIL). This American NGO signed an agreement with the Cameroon Government and its publication agencies to translate and distribute the Christian Bible into the over 250 indigenous languages of the country.⁴⁵ The use of the Bible and Koran for swearing during court sessions is also constitutionally impermissible. Besides, the pursuance of the policy of recognizing religious feasts as public holidays remains a legally questionable practice which, apart from favouring religion, causes misunderstanding between the government and some faiths. When the Islamic Tabasky feast coincided with the National Youth Day (a secular event) on 11 February 2003, the state postponed and substituted the Tabasky for the secular youth day.⁴⁶ This decision was interpreted as the meddling of the state in the religious realm. Consequently, some Muslims opposed the decision and celebrated the Tabasky. This tension between Islam and the state resulted from the unlawful recognition of religious feasts as public holidays. In sum therefore, the fact that the government provided the above financial and policy support to some religious traditions means that the secular clause was being transgressed.

With regard to the nexus between religion and politics, it was a spillover of the Ahidjo regime. Under Biya, the nexus heightened on the heels of the economic crisis and the request for multiparty governance which engulfed Cameroon in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period of economic and political upheaval, the Christian clergy increasingly became involved in politics by criticizing the manner in which the government addressed the economic crisis as well as the democratic process. In its pastoral letter of 20 March 1991 entitled “The Position of the PCC on Multi-party Politics,” the church called for more democratic reforms and urged Presbyterians to join the political struggle.⁴⁷ Generally, the PCC transgressed the

⁴⁵Pierre Alex Mbom, “State, Society and Secularism in Cameroon,” <http://iheu.org/content/state-society-and-secularism-cameroon> (Accessed on 13 July 2013).

⁴⁶ Adama, “Islam and State”.

⁴⁷ Akoko, “*Ask and You Shall be Given*”.

legislated wall of separation between state and religion in the political sphere by issuing pastoral letters, memos, and anti-secular sermons. Just like their PCC counterparts, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has addressed various political issues through sermons, press interviews and letters. The RCC rejected the privatization of religion by arguing in its Episcopal letter of January 1988 that it is a biblical obligation for Christians to involve in politics.⁴⁸ The lone Cardinal in the country, Christian Tumi, addressed public issues through interviews and pastoral letters. Disturbed by the meddling of the clergy in politics, the Biya regime criticized the churches for violating the secular clause. In response, the Moderator of the PCC, Rev. Awasum, made an open statement in 1993 dismissing arguments that the church should not venture into the political realm.⁴⁹ Following open criticisms by Cardinal Tumi in 2004, the Minister of Territorial Administration wrote an open letter to the Cardinal accusing him, in part, of violating the principle of the separation of the state and religion. It is surprising that the government which had so far violated secularism in a myriad of ways was accusing Christian churches for illegal involvement in politics. But these churches believe that they should speak out on political issues without bias or allegiance to any political party. Interestingly, Catholic prelates disagreed over political issues. After the proclamation of the 2004 elections, for instance, Cardinal Tumi observed that the election was marred by irregularities, while the Archbishop of Yaoundé, Victor Tonye Bakot, then President of the Cameroon Episcopal Conference issued a statement stressing that the election was free and fair.⁵⁰

The competitive multiparty politics that resulted from political liberalization pushed the Biya regime to deal cautiously with religious leaders who indulge in politics. This is perhaps because the government is conscious of the influence these religious leaders have on their converts. Indeed, there is the potential for religious leaders to turn their practitioners against the government in case of any open persecution. Could it be that the murder of some Catholic priests and nuns in Cameroon by unidentified persons since the mid-1990s is a

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 202.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

masked government strategy to check the churches' breach of secularism? The government has always denied any involvement in the killings and there is no evidence that the assassinations were perpetuated by the government hit-squads. However, the public has always suspected the murderers to be persons sponsored by the regime.⁵¹

Further, the government has intensified the co-opting of religious leaders, especially Muslim leaders and traditional rulers in the hope of surviving competitive multiparty politics. According to Adama, it was in the context of political competition that the Biya regime began considering traditional rulers as natural partners to the ruling Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) party on grounds of the 1977 law, which subordinated them to local administrative officers.⁵² The law made traditional rulers to be dependent on the state. Since the 1990s, it has been common to find Muslim religious authorities and traditional rulers (Chief Priests of Traditional Religion) imposing their political choices on their people. In the northern region, political parties, especially the ruling CPDM employed a strategic plan that involved Muslim chiefs.⁵³ In the southern part of the country, especially in the North West and South West Regions, most traditional rulers shelved the neutrality principle divinely conferred on them by ancestral spirits by making public their political choices. Some of them including the Fons of Mankon, Bali Nyonga and Bali Kumbat used their sacred religious societies to push their people to ally with the party in power.⁵⁴ Their palaces became centres for CPDM rallies. This faded their status as neutral chief priests as their palaces ceased to serve as rallying centres for everyone.⁵⁵ The regime even went as far as influencing the choice of successors to the thrones in the hope of having traditional rulers who could openly rally support for the CPDM party.⁵⁶ These political entanglements between the state and traditional rulers were diametrically opposed to the principle of separation between state

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Adama, "Islam and State," p. 58.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Samah, "Chiefs (Traditional Rulers) in Anglophone Cameroon".

⁵⁵ Tata, "The Status and Dignity of the Fon".

⁵⁶ Samah, "Chiefs (Traditional Rulers) in Anglophone Cameroon".

and religion. Evidently, the government violated the neutrality clause while the traditional rulers abused the authority and influence their priestly office offered them.

Evidently, the secular state system under Paul Biya's regime has operated in ways marked by unconstitutional entanglements between the state and religion. Although these legally questionable anti-secular practices were dictated by events such as the economic crisis and the return to competitive multiparty politics, the regime generally pursued the state-religion entanglements that were orchestrated by the Ahidjo regime. Since 1982, the regime has been consistent in violating the secular clauses of the constitution. Amazingly, the regime, quite often, accuses the Christian clergy for disregarding the wall of separation. In spite of this, the presence of religion in the public sphere heightened under the Biya regime.

Implications of the Transgression of the Secular Principle

The implications that arise when constitutionally established secularism is unendingly violated like the case of Cameroon are worth exposing. As already spotlighted, Cameroon's secular system has hardly been respected by both the state and the religious traditions within it. Given that the effectiveness of secularism in Cameroon remains a controversy, it has resulted in an aura of burning issues. The unconstitutional inclusion of religious studies in secondary schools has encouraged religious authorities to pressurize the government to officially recognize the subject among requirements for participation in competitive examinations into the public service. The state's refusal to yield to this pressure has quite often negatively affected its relationship with religious authorities. Lobbies that challenged secularism were not restricted to the full recognition of religion as a subject. Crises also accrued from the state's unconstitutional recognition of religious feasts as public holidays. Adama exposes how the *Conseil Supérieur Islamique du Cameroun* severely criticized the state in 2003 when the latter postponed and substituted the Islamic celebration of Tabaski for the secular youth

day.⁵⁷ This accounted for the verbal skirmishes that involved the Muslim leaders and the Minister for Interior Affairs. In some parts of the country, some Muslims disregarded the decree and celebrated the Tabaski in accordance with the Islamic calendar.

There are many of such issues around which conflicts can emerge due to the stalled nature of Cameroonian secularism. The ongoing debate on moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia and homosexuality has attracted the concern of both the government and religious leaders. If the government should legalize homosexuality, the leaders of the Christian and Islamic faiths who are already too vocal on the issue would not remain indifferent. Generally, the failure of Cameroonian secularism to establish a principled distance between religion and state has amounted to a vicious circle of conflict. The situation in Europe, especially France from whom Cameroon borrowed her secular apparatus, is not different. The headscarf crisis in France questioned the robust secular character of this western state. In Cameroon, it is common to find the government insisting on the strict respect of the secular system only when it seeks to assert its authority. Another dimension is that the crisis accruing from secularism has gone beyond the state and religious leaders. Secularism is now also opposed by politicians, civil society groups and academics. They argue that secularism in Cameroon is terribly flawed and conclude that it is a foreign principle that does not reflect the Cameroonian context. No wonder religion has gained a new strength in the political landscape of the country. It plays significant roles in ongoing political and social transformations. Hence, the most serious ramification of the transgression of the secular principle is its straining of the relations between the state and religion.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the degree at which the principle of separation of state and religion has been implemented in the post-colonial Cameroon state. After emerging from the colonial mould, Cameroon imported and adopted the western secular state system in

⁵⁷Adama, "Islam and State," 61-62.

the hope of limiting the entanglement between the state and the faiths that constitute its religious landscape. But this reciprocal separation of state and religion, as the study asserts, was not only vaguely defined but failed to reflect the Cameroonian local context. This resulted in the potential for its persistent violation by both parties on grounds of safeguarding mutual interest. Under the successive Ahidjo and Biya regimes, the secular principle was/is breached in a plethora of ways: meddling in religious affairs for personal interest, government support to religion, the use of several strategies by government to involve Muslim and traditional religious leaders in partisan politics, and the open criticism of the government by the Christian clergy. These legally questionable practices are evidences that the Cameroonian secular structure is in crisis. I still argue that the Cameroonian secular system has functioned in ways marked by significant departures from the clear separation between religion and state. Good enough, Keller had postulated that the clear separation of religion from state is yet to be seen in practical terms in most secular societies.⁵⁸ It is important to note that the separation of religion and state in Cameroon came at a time of pre-existing interaction between the two. As the study has shown, this interaction has stubbornly continued to this day.

This increasing strength of religion in the Cameroonian public debate conforms to Berger's postulation that the world is not secularized anymore.⁵⁹ Since the adoption of the secular policy in 1961, religion has persistently asserted its presence in the public space. In fact, as earlier observed, Cameroonian secularism has failed to establish a principled distance between religion and state. Dobbelaere's functional differentiation thesis is valuable in understanding why Cameroonian secularism is in crisis. As earlier argued functional differentiation had not yet segregated the political from the religious when Cameroon adopted the secular system. Besides, there is evidence that the Government of Cameroon has hardly shown interest in foregrounding the purpose of secularism. Presently, it seems that the government has lost sight of the

⁵⁸ T. Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, New York: Dutton, Penguin Group Inc., 2008.

⁵⁹ Berger, P. L., "The Desecularization of the World".

underlying purpose and *modus operandi* of this colonially inherited practice. This state-sponsored violation of secularism is fed by the desire of political and religious leaders to maximize their own power. Bhargava supports this view by arguing that secular states are characterized by autocratic rule. Post-colonial Cameroon is not an exception just like elsewhere in Africa where secularism is stalled by the pursuance of personal interest.

In the light of these revelations accruing from the study, there is need for Cameroonian secularism to be redefined. The constitutional refusal of any contact between religion and state is unattainable. It is an imported western practice that does not reflect the Cameroonian context. Indigenous religion as already noted permeates all areas of life making it difficult for a wall of separation between it and the state to exist. Further, foreign religions especially Christianity and Islam enjoyed some kind of interaction with the colonial state. All these make the principle of separation problematic. It was already mentioned that the form and content of secularism varies from context to context. Given that it is a western practice on Cameroonian soil, it is imperative for this secular system to be reconceived in a way that can enable state and religion to have some contact regulated by a legislated distance. This is what Bhargava labels a “principled distance” between state and religion.⁶⁰ The secularism clauses of the current constitution should be amended by introducing terms of engagement and disengagement between religion and state. This is because the Cameroonian context makes it possible for the secular state to engage with religion at various levels, social policy specifically.

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⁶⁰ Bhargava, “The Distinctiveness”.

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The Philosophy and Politics of Identity: Spinoza's Regional Anthropology

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Abstract

Getting back the human person to the right track so that s/he defines his/her own norms is the main objective of Spinoza. This paper focuses on the real nature of the human person from a well-defined theoretical pedestal: Western culture. Spinoza revolutionizes the concept of the human being. He no longer presents the person as "an empire within an empire," but as Desire. Desire expresses the ontological truth of being. The human being is capable of self-determination and freedom. It is no longer necessary for him to expect rewards. Life is the execution of power. To desire, is to invent values. The aim is to enable the immanent principle to triumph. This Spinozan effort, though new and opposed to the philosophical tradition, is inherent to Western philosophy characterized by the search and integration of something new. This positive aspect of Western wisdom may serve as a guide to the black African emancipation and adaptation in today's world.

Introduction

Spinoza's anthropology expresses the delicate move of medieval man/woman to modern man/woman. Medieval man/woman is steeped in sin which obliges him to occupy a position of obedience and thereby grips him in the claws of visceral servitude. In this context, man is no longer man. He/she is a stranger to him/herself. How then can we deliver him/her from this torpor? It is from this perspective that Spinoza proposes a new conception of the human person that will allow him/her to deliver him/herself from medieval chains and thus liberate him/her from slavery to freedom, from

servitude to fortitude. The intellectual reorientation initiated by Spinoza in the seventeenth century on the ontological, theological, political and especially anthropological setting, made him an emblem of “*Radical Enlightenment*.”¹ This expression gives us the understanding of a movement of thought that strongly advocates the firm and uncompromising individual autonomy in relation to power and religion. To better understand the intellectual rupture instigated by Spinoza, we must thoroughly grasp the principle that lays the foundation of European society, namely: power and religion. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe, and specifically the politically United Provinces were governed by feudalism. This was a highly hierarchical society where power was monarchical. As such, the majority of the population lived in an obvious state of subordination. And culturally, beliefs were dominated by religion, even though it was in a crisis as a result of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants.² As a matter of fact, during that era, theologians were the custodians of knowledge. In this context, nobody could challenge the secular hegemony of religion nor the feudal system in force which held human beings in fear and therefore in ignorance.

But due to his yearning for freedom, Spinoza had to rise against this state of affairs and earnestly worked towards breaking these dogmas to the point of being an outcast of the Jewish community of Amsterdam. Here it is not a question of apologizing for this philosopher; but to emphasize on the atypical novelty which he championed most especially on the anthropological standpoint. In effect, Spinoza proposes an original anthropology which is radically opposed to the ancients, medieval and modern philosophical traditions. Henceforth, it is no longer a question of a separatist anthropology which perceives a human person as a mixture of body and mind; but rather, of a unitary monistic anthropology which considers the attribute of thought (mind) and the extended attribute

¹ This expression is by Jonathan I. Israël, which constitute the main title of his book, *Les Lumières radicales. La philosophie, Spinoza et la naissance de la modernité (1650-1750)*, Traduction de Pauline Hugues, Charlotte Nordmann et Jérôme Rosan Vallon, Éditions Amsterdam, Paris, 2005, p.22.

² Jonathan I. Israël, « *Les briseurs de dogmes* », in le Point Hors-série : *Les Textes fondamentaux de la pensée des Lumières*, N° 26, Mars-Avril 2010, p.11.

(body) like two sides of the same coin. Thus, this new conception of the human person disqualifies any anthropocentrism, but presents the human person as part of nature, *a res among res*. Spinoza's concern was to demystify the concept of human nature as advocated by his predecessors (especially Descartes), because, for him,

*Most of those who spoke of human feelings and behaviours appear to consider, not natural things which follow the ordinary laws of Nature, but of things that would be out of nature. Better still, it would appear that they view man in nature as an empire within an empire.*³

As we can see, scholastic philosophers and Descartes have an erroneous conception of the human person. They conceive of the individual as “an empire within an empire” that is to say, they present the human being as a free being, a thinking substance, endowed with absolute powers. But the human being, according to Spinoza, is not “a mind, an understanding or reason,”⁴ he/she but first and foremost, a part of Nature. That means that he is reduced to the status of things. Then he/she is desire, body, and therefore, instinct. Such a conception of human nature has as stake the dissolution of the principle of transcendence in favour of the principle of immanence. This philosophical innovation which is inspired by the political and religious atmosphere that dominated seventeenth century Holland highlights the fundamental features of Western man namely, “*the thirst to understand and the love of freedom.*”⁵ If Spinoza destabilized certainties, it was in order to enrich and perpetuate Western culture. This was a philosophical effort to get the Dutch, that is to say, the West, and consequently the Jews, to go from a state of powerlessness to that of power. But then, did Spinoza's anthropology not remain locked up in the doldrums of national history, or in Jewish culture? Our objective here is to show that despite the philosophical revolution, Spinoza remained dependent on

³ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethique*, Troisième partie, préface, traduction de Roland Cailliois, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1954, p. 179.

⁴ René Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques*, Paris, Éditions Fernand Nathan, 1983, p. 48.

⁵ Martial Guérout, *Spinoza I-Dieu*, Paris, Éditions Montaigne, 1968, p. 9.

Jewish culture. But for the Africans, his concepts may constitute the “*secret of adaptation to the world and of adaptation to oneself.*”⁶

The Demystification of Human Nature

By the method of geometric exposition,⁷ Spinoza, like a physicist, aimed at radically deconstructing the separatist anthropology of his predecessors. In effect, his goal was to scientifically understand the real person as he/she appears and not as he was expected to be. Thus, he/she deals neither with the human nature of the ancient philosophers nor with the Cartesian conception, but with modern man/woman made up of desire, love and hatred:

*Realistic and objective thinker, says Tosel, he conceptually supports the real modern man. Not the Christian man who is torn between his irrational soul (doomed to sin) and his rational soul promoted to a supernatural destiny. Not the ancient sage who opposes the dynamism of the great passions of rational mastery. But, of course, the active and earthly man, fundamentally by selfish desire, in whom reason can arise at the end of a genesis which remains functional to passionate dynamism.*⁸

As we see with André Tosel who repeats here the arguments of Antonio Labriola,⁹ Spinoza wanted to build a world without a “*cultic quality.*” This explains why he proposed a new conception of the human person void of metaphysical prejudices and presuppositions, for to present the individual as reason is to preconceive “*universal ideas*”¹⁰ in the mind- A moral and therefore a reference to an absolute good. For in nature, there is no good or evil, since it exists for no end.¹¹ Hence, the models by which men represent themselves are only “*modes of thought, that is to say, notions we conceive because we compare*

⁶ Charles-Robert Dimi, *Sagesse boulon et philosophie*, Paris, Éditions Silex, 1982, p.133.

⁷ *Ethique*, Troisième partie, préface, P. 180.

⁸ André Tosel, *Du matérialisme de Spinoza*, Paris, Éditions Kimé, 1994, p.168.

⁹ Antonio Labriola, *Origine et nature des passions selon l’Ethique de Spinoza*. Cité par André Tosel, op.cit., p.167.

¹⁰ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethique*, Quatrième partie, préface, p.266.

¹¹ Ibid.

one thing with another."¹² In summary, the concepts of just, unjust, wrong doing and of merit are merely extrinsic concepts and not attributes which explain the nature of the mind.¹³

There is an apparent effort to embrace the moral (which appears as a normative discourse on good and evil considered as Universal) in favour of ethics and practical science of being. In this context, the human person no longer appears as reason, but as a being of passion, desire and a being of flesh and bone. Thus man/woman is a being who has a body capable of doing a multitude of things. So, it is therefore the return to the body long devalued by the philosophical tradition that will generate an anthropological revolution and make of Spinoza a materialist.

The Power of the Body

In ancient times, the body was considered, notably by Plato, as the grave of the soul. In the Middle Ages, with Saint Paul, it is sin. In modern times, more precisely with Descartes, it is a machine. But with Spinoza, it becomes in the words of Gilles Deleuze, a "Model."¹⁴ As can be seen, the whole philosophical tradition with the exception of the materialists, namely: Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius, have a morbid conception and thereby debasing the body. This explains why talking about the conception of the classical philosophers, Georges Gusdorf specifies that it is the maggot in a fruit.¹⁵ In other words, the body is a disease, a danger to the soul. It is precisely for this reason that Spinoza rejects tradition. He establishes the body into a "Model," "*he proposes to philosophers a new model: the body.*"¹⁶ Meanwhile, defining the body as a reference is a provocative formula when we know that the exploit of earlier

¹² Baruch Spinoza, *Ethique*, Quatrième partie, préface, p.267.

¹³ Ibid. Proposition XXXVII, scolie II, p. 304.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, philosophie pratique*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, p. 28.

¹⁵ Georges Gusdorf, *Traité de Métaphysique*, Paris, Éditions Armand Collin, 1956, p.174.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p.28.

philosophies was to dominate the body. As Epicurus,¹⁷ Spinoza rehabilitates the body, because we do not know the power of the body.

*As a matter of fact, nobody has so far been able to determine what the body can do. That is to say experience has so far not taught anybody what, thanks to the laws of nature only – inasmuch as it is only considered body, the body can or cannot do, unless determined by the mind.*¹⁸

In reality, no one knows what a body can do. In other words, we do not know what kind of affection we are capable of; we do not even know the extent to which our power goes. That would certainly mean that we have no exact knowledge of what the body can and that thought is not less superior to the mind that we have of it.

It is important to know the power of the body to understand that it is not conscience that determines what the body can do. Spinoza makes a distinction between conscience and thought. Thought is superior to conscience. He debases conscience, which expresses the existence of the id. There is a subconscious of thought and an unknown of the body. Spinoza would then appear as Freud's¹⁹ forerunner. To Spinoza, the conscience is the seat of illusions, "*When we dream that we are speaking, we believe to be talking under a free decision of the mind, and yet we are not talking, or, if we are talking, it is a spontaneous movement of the body.*"²⁰

In effect, there is no superiority of the soul over the body or superiority of the body over the soul. There is rather a "*parallelism*."²¹ According to Deleuze, "*parallelism*" is the Spinozan hypothesis (Spinoza never used that word) which not only denies any real causal relationship between mind and body, but prohibits all eminence of

¹⁷ Epicure, *Lettre à Hérodoté* In *Lettres*, Traduction de Octave Hamelin, Paris, Les Éditions Fernand Nathan, Collection « Les intégrales de Philo/Nathan », 1982, pp. 58-59.

¹⁸ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethique*, Troisième partie, proposition II, scolie, p.194.

¹⁹ Roger Pol-Droit in his paper entitled « *Une fécondité prodigieuse* », states that Spinoza is considered by Freud as one of his guides. In *Le Point* du Jeudi 12 juillet 2007, n°1817, p. 72.

²⁰ Baruch Spinoza, *Op. cit.*, p. 187.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, Philosophie pratique*, p.28.

one over the other. “*Parallelism*” is seen as the overthrow of the traditional principle on which morality rested. To Spinoza, what is action in the soul is necessarily action in the body, what is passion in the body is also necessarily passion in the soul. There is therefore a reciprocal relationship between the soul and the body.

To Spinoza, therefore, the body is, “A medium which expresses in a defined and determined manner, the essence of God as it is considered as an extended thing.”²² To be more explicit, the body is a singular thing: that is to say the manner in which an attribute of substance is assigned: the extent. In other words, the body is not a substance “*in itself*” which is conceived “*by itself*”. It is a specific thing which expresses in a determined manner the nature of God. On its part, the soul is “the idea of the body.”²³ According to Spinoza, idea refers to adequate or inadequate knowledge. By idea of the body, it should be understood that the body is the object of the soul. The human soul is thus knowledge. Knowledge is thus its substance. The soul is therefore strictly the equivalent from the perspective of the mind of what the body is from the perspective of the extended. If the soul is the idea of the body, it would mean that the soul is united to the body. The soul is no longer the link between the body parts and is neither the master nor slave of the body. The mind and body are one and the same thing now designed on the attribute of thought. Man/woman is not a mixture of substance and mind, he/she is one and indivisible. This implies that man has a body, that the mind is the structure of the human body. It is not just about any kind of body but a body capable of doing what the mind knows.

In fact, Spinoza wanted to build an ethical practice. And to do this requires an overturning of the tables of value. This has to do with turning our attention from the mind to the body, for the mind is the main model of speculation and body, the model of practice. To talk of the body is to question oneself of its power. It is finding out the ability of a body. Better still, it is to understand the internal structure of the body, that is to say the embodiment of the relationships that constitute the body. To question oneself on the internal structure of

²² Baruch Spinoza, *op. cit.*, Deuxième partie, Définitions, p.115.

²³ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethique*, Deuxième partie, proposition XV, Démonstration, P.137.

the body is to analyse the nature and the limits of its power of being affected.

Our objective here was to highlight the ontological reversal made by Spinoza which had to do with attaching the same importance to the body as to the mind, for the more a body is active, the more the mind is apt to understand.²⁴ So, there is no more any superiority of the soul over the body. The body and the mind are one and the same thing which express themselves differently. And this, says Paola Cuzzani, is “*The crux of the Spinozist anthropology.*”²⁵ However, to rehabilitate the body is also and at the same time to consider the human being as Desire and therefore, a being endowed with the capacity of becoming.

The Human Person as Desire

As we said earlier, the individual is not the juxtaposition of a soul and a body. He is a unitary being. But that does not mean he/she is a thinking substance,²⁶ but rather, he is a being of desire. However, desire here is not a lack as was represented by philosophical tradition. It is “*the very essence of the human person.*”²⁷ Desire therefore appears as the constitutive principle of the human being. The human individual is thus fundamentally desire, that is to say dynamic effort to persevere in his being; instinct of preservation and power increase. Desire here takes on a positive connotation: it is no longer suffering to live nor lack, for such a definition has as stake the existence of a free subject. But there it is strength to exist, power to affirm.

To Spinoza, desire is not the lower part of sensitivity, the source of evil and alienation which ought to be sanctioned by reason and morality. On the contrary, desire is an affirmative movement of the body and the mind. It is the action of Joy. It is the very essence of

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Proposition XIII, scolie, p.130.

²⁵ Paola De Cuzzani, « *Une anthropologie de l'homme décentrée* », in *Spinoza sous le prisme de son anthropologie*, Volume 9, n° 1, Éditions société de philosophie du Québec, Printemps 2002, p.14.

²⁶ René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, Paris, Éditions Fernand Nathan, 1981, p. 55.

²⁷ Baruch Spinoza, *Éthique*, Troisième partie, Proposition IX, scolie P.191.

the individual as a productive force. It is the vital movement of the being. That is why death or negation is neither included in the essence of being nor is it included in the definition of desire: "*An idea which excludes the existence of our body cannot be in our mind, it is rather contrary to it.*"²⁸

Desire is production. It is the productive force of our judgments:

*It is therefore established by the above facts that we make no effort towards something that we do not want and do not tend to it with appetite (appetere) or desire, because we believe that it is good; it's the opposite: we believe that it is good, because we are making an effort towards it that we want it and tend to it with appetite or desire.*²⁹

Thus, we can learn from this passage that desire appears as the axiological principle of everything, the immanent causality of all human action. At the control tower of our actions there is therefore desire. Considering Desire as the principle of all values is questioning the "*illusion of the objectivity of values*"³⁰ which first stipulates that by nature, the individual tends to something other than his/her individual self; furthermore, that certain objects and beings are meant to fill this vacuum. Such is the intellectual turmoil triggered by Spinoza as opposed to his predecessors who were considering reason and morality as fundamental sources of human actions.

However, to consider desire as preceding all value is to acknowledge in the human person the ability to move in conformity with his/her own personal purpose and therefore confirm the existence of ethical relativism.

Our purpose in this section was to present the new humanity of Spinoza. It is therefore clear from our analysis that human nature has lost all the old privileges: he/she is no longer the centre of the world, but a thing among things, for he is a finite part of the infinite substance. Moreover, there is no duality of being given that the soul and the body are one and the same thing expressed differently.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Troisième partie, Proposition X, p.192.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Proposition IX, scolie p.191.

³⁰ Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Paris, Les Éditions de minuit, Collection « Le sens commun », 1969, p. 85.

Finally, man is no longer reason, but desire, meaning effort of being. In the final analysis, the human person is power to exist. This power to exist which is unique to each human individual means that everyone is master of his/her destiny. There is no external or higher value which could determine his/her life. The individual is master his/her destiny. In other words, each person creates his/her own standards. Hence, the origin of the moral relativism which is at the foundation of democracy in modern Europe.

The Lineaments of Modern Democracy

The distinctive features of Spinoza's new anthropology had to bring about a radical change in the mind-set of all of Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century. Our intention here is to show that this anthropology is the theoretical basis on which the modern idea of democracy is founded. In other words, the theoretical foundations of democratic political thought of modern Europe.³¹

Ethical Relativism

We have just defined the human person from Spinoza's standpoint as Desire. Desire is the effort made by every being to persevere in its being. In this sense, desire is nothing other than the *conatus* or the natural right. Thus, the desire that we also call natural right or *conatus* which constitutes the essence of the human individual is not the result of reason if not the individual would be determined by it: *The natural power of men or what is the same thing as their natural right, should not be defined by reason, but by whatsoever interest which determines it to act and makes an effort to preserve itself.*³²

As a matter of fact, the natural power of human beings is not defined by reason, for humans are more led by blind desire than by reason. That which is first and constitutive in the human being is desire. Through desire, all is allowed. The individual can do

³¹ Antonio Negri, *Spinoza subversif. Variations (in) actuelles*, Traduction de Marilène Raiola et François Matheron, Paris, Éditions Kimé, 1994, p. 19.

³² Baruch Spinoza, *Traité politique*, II, 5, Traduction d'Émile Saisset révisée par Laurent Bove, Paris, Éditions, Librairie Générale Française, 2002, p.122.

everything without limit: he/she overcomes all prohibitions. As Spinoza puts it,

*The natural right of the kingdom in which all men are born and live, defends nothing but what nobody desires or cannot do; it therefore neither rejects contentions, nor hatred, nor anger, nor tricks nor anything at last that interest can seek.*³³

According to Spinoza, desire appears as a principle that is unique to each human individual and which allows him/her to invent value. So there is therefore no paradigm or archetypal model. Given that the human individual is a power, that is to say, the desire to be, to stretch himself and to live fully, he himself must map out his itinerary; to be more precise, he must only follow the internal path of his desire and not universal ideas that the average mortal person usually perceives as models. As such, the notions of perfection and imperfection, of good and evil, of justice and injustice, vary from one person to another.³⁴

Each human individual acts according to his/her self-utility. Self-utility is what actually fuels the power to exist. It is the source of joy and satisfaction. The human being only seeks what is good for him/her and not what is good for everyone. At this juncture then, we can talk of selfishness, but what we want to highlight here is axiological relativism. Everything varies from one individual to another. Nothing is inherently good. In nature, there is neither good nor bad, nor justice, nor fault nor sin, etc. These notions are human conceptions. For example, says Spinoza, “*music is good for the melancholic, bad for those who are in pain; but for the deaf, it is neither good nor bad.*”³⁵ Through this example, we can say that there is no transcendent value. Nothing comes from space. Spinoza places the human being beyond good and evil. The human individual has his desire as his only reference. Because the individual is endowed with a natural right, a sovereign right of nature follows the necessity of his nature.

³³ *Ibid.*, II, 8, p. 125.

³⁴ *Idem.*, *Ethique*, Quatrième partie, Préface, p. 267 et aussi dans la Troisième partie, proposition LI, scolie, p. 228.

³⁵ Baruch Spinoza., *Ethique*, Quatrième partie, Préface, pp. 267-268.

But individually, the human being cannot effectively resist the overwhelming power of nature. If he/she must survive, he/she is obliged to ally with other individuals to make up one body, thus giving rise to the common right. But the common right does not mean that human individuals should abandon their rights in the hands of one person as Hobbes suggests. On the contrary, the common right in this context implies a consensus right which unites the natural right of every individual. As such, the State would be the expression of the right of the multitude which in turns reflects the natural right of every human individual.

Multitude as the Strength of the State

To consider the multitude as the strength of the State implies an important political stake. This is the radical change of the direction of sovereignty. In effect, before Spinoza, sovereignty was defined from the legal and moral standpoint, which implies that sovereignty is external to the collective body. In this context, the law is imposed on the citizen who does not see his/her involvement in decision making. There is a vertical relationship between the right of the city and the citizen. As such, the problem of obedience arises as a major political problem. Obedience implies that the citizen should “*execute commands by submitting to the only commanding authority.*”³⁶ Obedience therefore embodies the theory of duties. What matters is what ought to be and not what is. The citizen in this case cannot enjoy his freedom. He/she is drowned in the icy waters of heteronomy. He/she does not act. He/she is subject to; he/she bathes in fear and, therefore, lives in sadness. The tyrant and the priest just need his emotions to exercise their power because sadness does not make one smart. But Spinoza’s objective was to restore joy to humankind. That is why he carries out a radical transposition of the legal and moral domain to which the political question is usually asked in the ontological field. In other words, Spinoza based his political theory on what is natural and common to humans, namely the *conatus* or desire or the natural right. Therefore, Spinoza notes in the domain of the immanence the concept of sovereignty which expresses the

³⁶ *Idem.*, Œuvre II : *Traité théologico-politique*, chapitre V, traduction de Charles Appuhn, Paris, Éditions Garnier-Frères, 1965, p.107.

overall *conatus*. Sovereignty is the power of affirmation and the multitude of resistance to self-determination. From then, the political problem is not in terms of obedience, but rather in terms of prudence, that is to say power effectuation. It is thus a question of freedom. How can one ensure in full measure one's power of affirmation and resistance? It is necessary that the individual *conatus* unites as one body to form a global *conatus* to resist any violence. Entrusting sovereignty in the hands of the multitude is to undertake a salutary revolutionary project which radically involves denying political absolutism and anarchy. The multitude in clear terms is the power or effort of being capable of self-determination all together. Sovereignty as a right is the immanent affirmation of the constituent political power of the multitude. That is the core of Spinoza's policy. But the problem that remains is that of knowing whether this first gesture of Spinoza which entrusts the sovereignty of the State in the hands of a common college of power holders constituted by the consent of all is not a reflection of European culture. In other words, the tumult begun by Spinoza has as main objective the preservation of national interest.

Spinoza in the Spheres of Nationalism

Spinoza's political anthropology does not spring from the ground like mushrooms. It sprang from the concrete historical and cultural situation of Holland in the second half of the seventeenth century. In this part, we shall show that Spinoza's doctrine bears traces of his native land and its acquisitions.

Spinoza's Politics: A Reflection of Dutch National History

We do not deny the fact that Spinoza's anthropological ideas and policies have a universal scope, but above all, they trace back the history and culture of Dutch national life. In the seventeenth century, Europe groaned under the common weight of feudalism and religion. In the religious setting, sectarian strife between Catholics, Lutherans or Calvinists and reformists arose with acuity which led to intolerance and narrowed individual freedoms. Politically, it was the reign of feudalism. Power was held by a minority that also suppressed

individual freedoms. It is in this context of deprivation of freedom throughout Europe that Spinoza actually began to philosophize.

But in the specific case of Holland, it was its decadence which led Spinoza to develop a “*dialogic discourse*”³⁷ beginning with the diagnoses of the reasons for the decline. In effect, the sudden fall of the Republic of Holland is not explained by the fact that it spent its time to deliberate, but because of the poor organization of its State and the very small number of rulers. This poor organization is explained by the absence of institutional reforms, for after the sudden death of William II, the Taciturn which had secured a final victory over Spain, the post of Stadtholder which was the exclusive privilege of the House of Orange and the symbol of national unity, even unoccupied (because William III was born two months after his father’s death), remained intact, which Spinoza considered as the first political mistake.

The second most serious mistake was to believe in governing the multitude with a small number of leaders who, therefore, were not able to actually express the common good. The multitude does not participate in the economic expansion of the bourgeois class in power. This is the reason why it no longer finds the need to express its egalitarian aspiration and its desire for democracy only through the path of revolt that is supported by the Gomarists and which shall crystallize William III for his advantage later. Moreover, despite the existence of the parliament of the State’s General, the Republic is in fact governed by a single man: the permanent secretary of the board. Senior officials had become essential characters of the State at the expense of the democratic functioning of its sovereign assembly.

The class of regents on the other hand, far from having as political project the building of “*entirely absolute*” an sovereignty, which could have led the aristocratic State to perfection by expanding its ability to debate and democratic decision within large assemblies, rather concerns and produces its power but in fear and contempt of the multitude in the economic domain which is the vital area of the concerns of regents where there is shrewish exploitation of the poor

³⁷Expression used by Charles-Robert Dimi, *Sagesse boulon et philosophie*, p.54, to show the necessity and importance of contradictory dialogue in the growth of reason.

than in the political domain where only the descendants of the richest patrician families, their relatives or their friends or business associates are appointed to the rank of regents.

It is the blind strategy of the State: dictatorship, exploitation, favouritism, nepotism, corruption, which in 1672 misled the Republic of Holland. It is this deleterious climate that Spinoza was provoked to write the *Political Treaty*. A book in which he proposed referential constitutions which would consecrate the sovereignty of the State in the hands of the multitude.

Finally, if the right of the city is not determined by the multitude, the State would then plunge into a terrible fall as the Republic of Holland of 1672. It is therefore necessary to respect the desires, the commitments and the aspirations of the masses to the letter in order to live in a State of rights and freedoms.

The Apology of the Hebrew State

To enlighten the relationship between the multitude and its institutions, Spinoza was inspired by the most perfect political organization in the servitude: the Hebraic theocracy led by Moses. For Spinoza, Moses was a genius because he was able to conceive stable institutions not opposed to the Hebrew tradition. But rather, strong institutions which stood for public good and the interest of the State which dismisses every reason to revolt. Moses' peculiarity came from the fact that he ensured that he does not lead the Jewish people with fear, but rather, by every Jew's personal disposition. As such, every Jew was undertaking his/her own duty on his/her own accord. But how then can this new idea be explained? In effect, two reasons explain this fact. Firstly, the natural insubordination of the masses that were not afraid of being dominated by strength only, and the threat of a war requiring that soldiers be led by persuasion rather than punishment and threat.³⁸ As such, each person wrestles "*to distinguish himself by his courage and greatness rather than just fleeing from torture.*"³⁹ By a divine virtue, Moses introduced religion in the State in such a way that each individual was carrying out his or her own duty by devotion rather than through fear. Then he gratified them with

³⁸ Baruch Spinoza, Œuvre II : *Traité théologico-politique*, chapitre V, pp.107-108.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.108.

rewards and making to them in the name of God, promises for the future. Moses did not undertake a brutal rupture of the regime between the departure and the creation of the Hebrew State. He succeeded to maintain in a state of refined slavery so that they would not be so free. What Spinoza praises in Moses is the fact of succeeding to impose his will on the people with ease. Moses was not a stranger to the Hebrews. Rather, he was the body of the Jewish people, his memory at a superior state of perfection. As Laurent Bove declares, he is “*the productive imagination of the body of the Hebrew people.*”⁴⁰ As such, Spinoza highlights the fact that to cause men to accept a belief or to turn away from it, we ought to absolutely go from certain points granted and wrestle to convince on experience or on reason. Moses is the prototype of head of State because he knew how to adapt his teachings to the understanding of the crowd and through that, to force by that, these citizens to faithfulness. He took the advantage of the habits of the people to strengthen his power, which assures the conservation of the Hebrew State.

To rule properly, one needs to go from the internal law which rules over the movement of the masses. However, can this immanent philosophy not be considered the remedy for the liberation of the African?

Spinoza's Anthropology: A Powerful Lever for African Liberation

The new conception expounded by Spinoza can be an important approach for the emancipation of Africa from the barriers that are strangling the continent. Here it is not a matter of an invitation to a cultural alienation because in this era of globalization, no civilization can survive without external influence(s). Rather, the question here is to see oneself in the mirror of Spinoza's conception so as to be able to overcome every “*semblance*”⁴¹ and transform nature. This Spinozan philosophy, as expounded by Charles Robert Dimi, is indispensable, first because it is similar to the African thought in the

⁴⁰ Laurent Bove, « *De l'étude de l'État hébreux à la démocratie. La stratégie politique du conatus spinoziste* », in *Philosophiques*, Vol. 29, n.1, 2002, p. 113.

⁴¹ Charles-Robert Dimi, *Sagesse boulon et philosophie*, p.54.

sense that it has as “*quintessence, the principle of transcendence in immanence.*”⁴² As a matter of fact, Spinoza's philosophy is unique in that it brings in the synonymy between God and Nature. Nothing is out of Nature; nothing is outside and above Nature. God is in the world, the world is in God: “*All that is, is in God, and nothing without God can exist or be conceived.*”⁴³ As far as African wisdom is concerned, it is also “*based on the principle of transcendence in immanence.*”⁴⁴ By this, we are referring to an “*anthropomorphic wisdom*”⁴⁵ which sees the human being as the centre of the world. In this wisdom, the African sees his reflection in everything. Here, everything is alive: animals, plants, stones, the word ..., but the problem that is that this African thought is static and conservative; the objective being the singular quest for the harmony of the group, whereas that of Spinoza is dynamic and a source of progress.⁴⁶

Spinoza's anthropology can therefore give rise to the liberation of the African in the sense that it can cause him/her to break with the ways of being, of doing and of dogmatic thoughts, which constitute a real obstacle to his hatching with regard to the harmony he/she seeks at all cost. The conservative mind implies self-satisfaction. And self-satisfaction corrodes reason. With Spinoza, it is important to continually transcend his/her current state towards every new perspective provided they conform to our nature.

But such an attitude requires sacrificial efforts, that is to say, a laborious and painful mental effort, for that which is easy is wrong. Intellectual effort allows one to deny one's culture to better find and transform nature.

The immanent philosophy of Spinoza can, if followed, give rise to the positive transformation of the African. This philosophy gives power, dynamism and the yearning for research. This is what it requires to entice the African to transform him/herself and appropriate nature.

⁴² Charles-Robert Dimi, *Sagesse boulon et philosophie*, p.62.

⁴³ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethique*, Première partie, proposition XV, p.79.

⁴⁴ Charles-Robert Dimi, *op.cit.*, p.16.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

Conclusion

To sum up, Spinoza's unitary anthropology is an original anthropology that rises in opposition to that of the ancient, medieval, and modern philosophers. It has as main stake, the triumph of the immanence. Thus, the human person is no longer a creature of God, but a part of God. He/she is no longer endowed with a power which is similar to that of God. He/she is Desire; desire to be, to stretch him/herself, to live fully. This new anthropology allows the real modern person to know that what is above him/her and determines his life comes from him. In order not to be a stranger to him/herself, the African can see him/herself on this Spinozan theory of the human person so as to be him/herself and at the same time appropriate nature.

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Being a Woman in African Culture: How Culture Shapes and Defines the Status of Women

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&

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Abstract

Women in patriarchal societies have been conditioned by their societies to harmful cultural practices, customs and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate male domination. Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, bride wealth, polygamy, and widowhood rites, have physical and psychological effects on the condition and total wellbeing of women. Also, motherhood and marriage are some of those valued cultural institutions in Africa which impact negatively on the status of women and prevent them from realizing their full potentials. In most African societies, women are valued only as wives and mothers with little consideration given to the fact that apart from being women, they are also human beings with equal rights. In this paper, we argue that some of beliefs, customs and practices that discriminate against women have become anachronistic to our changing world. Sexism, like racism, is not based on any fundamental differences between men and women, but on convention, on culture. When these biased and discriminatory cultural practices have taken place for too long, women begin to view them as natural and even assist in their promotion. If we are to achieve sustainable development in Africa, those cultural practices that discriminate against and debase the woman must be revised or completely abandoned and the woman fully empowered because women are and have always been key partners in development in all societies and in all historical epochs.

Introduction

Apart from anthropological and sociological studies, African philosophers are just beginning to take the gender question in Africa

seriously. Thousands of women in Africa have been reduced to a subservient and second class position by their societies through cultural prejudices, beliefs, customs, practices, and institutions which limit their capacities to realize their full potentials as real and equal members of their societies. In most African cultures, there are social inequalities between men and women in almost all spheres of life. Most societies discriminate against women in relation to education, employment, access to land, appointment and promotion. Social inequalities between men and women are usually justified on the basis of biological or sexual differences. It may seem that after so much talk about the promotion of the rights of the woman, much has changed especially in liberal democratic societies. But this is not the case in many African societies. In most African societies men and women who attain the same level of education are hardly given the same consideration when it comes to employment, appointment and promotion. Employers prefer male to female employees on the basis that women have a biological function which is only suitable for reproduction and child rearing. In some societies where women are found in top management positions, they are only used as window dressing. All these provoke the question: Are there any ontological differences between men and women? Is gender inequality in Africa not an impediment to the African woman in realizing her full potential as an equal partner in development?

In this paper, we use the term Africa to refer to sub-Saharan Africa. Africa is a very diverse continent culturally and geo-politically and the problems faced by women in North Africa may not be the same problems faced by women in the East, West, or South Africa.¹ Even within sub-Saharan Africa, it is not the case that we would find exactly the same problems that women encounter across the region. Thus, the expression 'being woman in African culture' should not be interpreted to mean that the challenges that women face in Africa are naturally the same across the entire continent. In some cultures women are key stakeholders in the day-to-day functioning of the society and play critical roles in decision making. Hence, because of

¹ Lilian Lem Atanga, 'African Feminism' in *Gender and Language in Sub-Saharan Africa: Tradition, Struggle and Change*, Lilian Lem Atanga et al. (eds.), John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013, pp.301-315.

cultural diversity, the problems may differ from one region to another in terms of prevalence and intensity.

The debate on the extent to which human characteristics can be innate or learned has been a central contention in feminist philosophy. Arguments have been advanced by researchers in different cultures to justify innate sex differences between women and men as responsible for the intellectual, physical, moral and psychological inferiority of women. Plato thinks that men and women do not have different natures which make one superior to the other. He sees the differences between male and female only in terms of the fact that “the female bears and the male begets.”² Aristotle on his part views sex differences between men and women as the basis of women’s inferiority. He argues that women's role in reproduction, gestations, labour, and lactation are the causes of their intellectual inferiority to the men.³ These arguments have been vigorously criticized by feminists who see inequalities between men and women as influenced by culture. Although proponents of the influence of nature over nurture or nurture over nature may argue strongly on both sides and even talk pass each other, it is important to make a critical appraisal of African traditional practices which are detrimental to the moral, intellectual, social, political, economic and psychological development of the African woman. According to Sir Francis Galton, the author of the term eugenics, “nature is all that a man brings with himself into the world while nurture is every influence from without that affects him after his birth.”⁴

In this paper we argue that gender inequalities are not natural; they are the product of cultural/social construction through the processes of socialization. Gender inequalities and the practices and customs that promote it fall within the three evils which Kwasi Wiredu thinks may jointly afflict a society and hold it from developing. These are anachronism, authoritarianism and

²Plato, *The Republic*, Trans. By Desmond Lee, London, The Penguin Classics, 1946, V-344e.

³Nancy Tuana, “Aristotle and the Politics of Reproduction” in Bar-Ami Bar On, *op.cit.* p.188.

⁴ Francis Galton, *English Men of Science, their Nature and Nurture*, cited by Richard A. Lippa, in *Gender, Nature and Nurture*, Mahwah J.N, Lawrence Elbaum Associates, 2002, p.XV.

supernaturalism.⁵ Something is said to be anachronistic if it has outlived its “suitability.”⁶ Anachronism is the refusal to “perceive anachronistic things for what they are” and to dispose of or revise them “as the case may require.”⁷ As we shall show below, some cultural values, beliefs, and practices which consider women as inferior to men have outlived their suitability in our modern world. As far as authoritarianism is concerned, any social organization is authoritarian “if it entails any person being made to do or suffer something against his will, or if it leads to any person being hindered in the development of his own will.”⁸ In simple terms, authoritarianism is “the unjustified overriding of an individual’s will.”⁹ In the case of gender inequality, people are mostly informed and influenced by customs and practices which are not rationally justified. Such unchallenged and unjustified beliefs are dangerous because they may even be turned against the people who hold them. When a people continuously cling to a practice even if that practice or custom debase and dehumanize the human person on the basis that it is their tradition, or as it is commonly stated: ‘this is what our ancestors/people said/say,’ they are under the tyranny of tradition, the worst form of authoritarianism because irrational, it is defended by the majority (who have only credulously received them and do not understand why and have not tried to question why) against a few who challenge it. Here, what is right is what conforms to tradition and what is wrong is what does not. In his *On Liberty*, J.S. Mill points out the danger of this kind of authoritarianism: “The despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement, being in unceasing antagonism to that disposition to aim at something better than customary, which is called, according to circumstances, the spirit of liberty, or that of progress or improvement.”¹⁰

⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, p.1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, edited with an Introduction by Currin V. Shields, New York, Pyramid Books, 1966, p. 96.

Finally, supernaturalism is simply the belief in the existence of paranormal beings. Believing in supernatural beings is not evil per se; it is the irrational and unjustified seeking of the supernatural beings/forces as the basis of morality that is bad. Some of the beliefs, customs and institutions that encourage the subordination of women in most African societies are strongly tied to some supernatural belief or the other.

Women's inferiority cannot be blamed on their sex. It is the product of the patriarchal structure which has been established in most African societies for a very long time. When Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, argues that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman,"¹¹ she is implying that to be a woman is a social construct where being born a female, a woman is expected to possess traits of femininity such as docility, fragility, caring, and vulnerability. She is expected to play the role of her gender. In most African societies, social discrimination against women is so overwhelming that it has produced in women moral, emotional, intellectual, as well as political and economic inferiority, which have come to be interpreted as natural. Parents, peer groups, teachers, the mass media, and other social and cultural institutions play great roles in constructing gender differences. In some societies, women are trained from childhood to play their expected role— marriage and motherhood; rather than becoming full and equal productive members of their societies. In some areas, women are initiated into marriage and motherhood through female genital mutilation (FGM) thereby, controlling their sexuality and promoting their objectification.

Most African societies are patriarchal with beliefs, customs, institutions and cultural practices which define the woman as inferior to the man. There are diverse oppressive practices which are biased against women and help promote female subordination.¹² In such societies, women have been indoctrinated to view the world from a patriarchal standpoint. In such societies, the woman is seen as the

¹¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, New York, Vintage Books, 1989, p. 267.

¹² Charles Fornchingong, "Unbending the Gender Narratives in African Literature" in, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Issue 8, 2006, pp.135-136.

‘other.’¹³ In what follows, we examine the socialization processes in African homes as well as social and traditional institutions and practices such as female genital mutilation, widowhood practices, polygamy, bride-wealth and marriage/motherhood and how they define women to subordinate positions in the society and cultivate in them an inferior consciousness.

African Gender Socialization Processes and the Inculturation of Traditional Values

In all societies human behaviour is governed and determined by beliefs, customs and institutions. Gender socialization processes in Africa determine the perception of male and femaleness. For the simple fact that most families prefer male to female children, the girl child is born to a low status and is socialized to accept male domination.¹⁴ Most men usually express their wish to have boy children especially as their first-born. Families always prefer boys in order to perpetuate the family name. It is believed that girls lose their identity when they get married. All these have resulted in different socialization for the boy and the girl child with the girl child socialized to develop her femininity and fulfil her future role as a wife and mother.¹⁵

In the first place, the status of the girl child is that of a helper—a housekeeper who takes care of others at home. In the typical African home, there is strict gender division of labour. Household chores and care-giving fall almost exclusively on the shoulders of daughters and their mothers. Hardly do sons participate equally in domestic work. Girls take on household and care-giving tasks in addition to, or instead of going to school. As early as five years the girl child can carry and look after a new born.¹⁶ Even as the girl child grows up her play periods are reduced with the increase allocation of

¹³ Simone de Beauvoir, *op.cit.*, p.xxxv.

¹⁴ Wilhelmina J. Kalu, “Violence Against Women: Impact of Culture on Womanhood” in, Leonore L. Adler and Florence L. Denmark, *International Perspectives on Violence*, Westport, CT., Praeger, 2004, p.186.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.187.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

household chores and are confined to the meal and food preparation sector.

Girls are socialized into prioritizing family and community while the pursuance of their own interests is discouraged. With this mind-set inculcated in the girl child and with the pressure of household tasks, she is unable to perform well at school. It has been shown that girls perform poorly in subjects that require greater study time and practice that carry more assignment.¹⁷ African parents are more likely to encourage the male child than the female to study. Boys are therefore free from time-consuming household chores. In some parts of Africa the education of the girl child is undervalued because it is seen as a waste of resources, since, as it is sometimes erroneously believed, she will eventually get married and be useful only to her husband and his family.

At puberty, girls and boys undergo the initiation process in different ways and for different reasons. Most of the initiation processes such as female circumcision prepare the girl child for marriage and reproduction.¹⁸ In the Nandi society of Ghana, for example, girls are initiated and educated in matters of housework and marital relationships.¹⁹ They are taught how to look attractive, have sexual intercourse and bear children for their husbands. The boys on their part are trained to fully integrate into the wider society with all its privileges and responsibilities.²⁰ In the Ndebele society of South Africa, the boy child is beaten by his peers during the initiation exercise. The aim of this is to make the boy hard.²¹ With this kind of socialization, there is no doubt why women are considered fit only for the home while the men are bread-winners. Women are not born into a low status but become inferior as a result of the traditional initiation and socialisation processes that girls go through when they are young. Some of these cultural beliefs and practices that promote them constitute the greatest obstacles to gender equality and the

¹⁷Obanya P., "A longitudinal study of school subject preferences of a group of Nigerian adolescents," cited in Wilhemina J. Kalu, *op.cit.*, p.189.

¹⁸John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann, 1969, p.131.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p.129.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p.132.

²¹ *Ibid.* p.131.

empowerment of women in Africa and is one of the factors that have hampered the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in this area and the development of the continent because women constitute an important part of the population and have always played a primordial role in the development of their societies.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the Objectification of Women

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) otherwise known as female circumcision is one of those traditional practices that are still common in some African societies. FGM includes a range of surgical activities that involve complete or partial removal or alteration of the sterna genitalia for non-medical reasons and takes place in diverse cultural contexts in different parts of African.²² FGM is an ancient practice that is associated with initiation, Islam and patriarchy. This practice is common in most sub-Saharan African countries, extending to West Africa; from Mauritania to Cameroon, across Central Africa and in the East, reaching from Tanzania to Ethiopia.²³ In Cameroon, it is common in the Northern and South West regions of the country. Arguments have been advanced to compare the circumcision in boys to that of girls, but nothing like mutilation of a healthy organ in women can be compared to the removal of the foreskin in boys.²⁴

There are four main classifications of female genital mutilation. The first is the removal of the clitoral hood or the prepuce (skin around the clitoris). The second is the removal of the entire clitoris and most or all of the labia minora. The third is the removal of the entire clitoris, that is, the labia minora and the labia majora.²⁵ The fourth, which is always classified under FGM, but not FGM per se is infibulation, which is the most extreme form of FGM. Infibulation

²²Bettina Shell-Duncan, ed., *Female Circumcision in Africa: Culture, Controversy and Change*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2000, p.2.

²³ Loretta M. Kopelman, "Female Genital Circumcision and Conventional Ethical Relativism," in Rosemarie Tong et al, ed., *Globalizing Feminist Bioethics: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, Boulder, CO., Westview Press, 2001, p.221.

²⁴ Bettina Shell-Duncan, *op.cit.*p.3.

²⁵ Loretta M. Kopelman, *op.cit.* p.221.

is the procedure that involves excision and the subsequent sealing of the vagina not by stitching but by allowing blood to coagulate to form what amounts to an artificial hymen.²⁶ One or two of these types may be practiced in an area where the culture is perpetuated.

Some reasons have been advanced for the practice of FGM. These include religious requirement, group identity, cleanliness and health, virginity, family honour and morality and marriage goals; including greater sexual pleasure for men.²⁷ Kiso Thomas argues that people in such cultures may support FGM as a good practice only because they do not understand that it is a leading cause of sickness, or even death for girls, mothers, infants and a major cause of infertility, infections and maternal fatal complications.²⁸

The reason commonly advanced for the practice of FGM—health and hygiene, is incompatible with stable data from surveys provided by research in these cultures. For example, the African Environment Survey of 1999, the World Health Organization (WHO) Report and a study carried out in 2007 by Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD), titled "A statistical Estimate to the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales" all reveal that FGM has been linked to morbidity such as shock, maternal fatal complications and protracted labour. Another reason advanced for FGM is that it preserves the virginity and family honour and preserves morality. Here it is believed that the practice is to prevent women from sexual intercourse before marriage.²⁹ It is believed that in such societies uncircumcised women have excessive and uncontrollable sexual drives. FGM is therefore an indirect means used by the patriarchal societies to control women's sexuality. Others hold that it is aimed at preparing girls for marriage, including greater beauty for women and sexual pleasure for men.³⁰ To survive economically, women in these cultures must marry and they would not be acceptable marriage partners if they have not undergone this rigid traditional surgery.

²⁶ Bettina Shell-Duncan, *op.cit.*, p.4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Kiso Thomas, *Circumcision of Women*, cited in Loretta Copelman, *op.cit.*

²⁹ Loretta Copelman, *op.cit.*, p.221.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Agnes Apusigah argues that such women are often quick to complain about their suffering, yet they are the ones who offer themselves for such brutalities to be performed on them.³¹ She argues that all these are because they have been led to believe that it is the only way to prepare them for their future husbands.³² But why should women be obliged to undergo such excruciating and body deformation surgery as a preparation for marriage whereas men and future husbands do nothing in preparation to receive them?

We cannot however ignore the effects that the practice of FGM has on women. Research has shown that it causes disability, diseases, and death among mothers, infants and children. It results in difficulty in consummating marriage, infertility, increased morbidity and mortality.³³ Female genital mutilation is simply the objectification of women. This practice therefore alienates women from their bodies because they are seen only in relation to the pleasure and happiness of their husbands and not their own pleasure and happiness.

Bride-Wealth and the Commodification of Women

The payment of bride wealth is a very common practice in most African cultures. Bride-wealth, otherwise known as dowry or bride price, is a sum of money or property paid to the bride's family as an indication that they have formally accepted the marriage of their daughter to the groom. Most of the gifts that are offered to the girls' family include cattle, money, food stuff and other articles. It is usually considered as a token of gratitude on the part of the bridegroom's family for the care over their would-be wife and for allowing her to become their wife.³⁴ It is a symbolic way to show that she is given under mutual agreement of the two families. This is important in that marriage is not simply considered as a union between consenting parties, but a union between two families. It is believed that bride-wealth increases the value of the girl and her family. Upon divorce or

³¹Agnes AtiaApusigah, "Is Gender Yet Another Colonial Project? A Critique of Oyeronke Oyewumi's proposal," *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy, Special edition on African Feminisms*, in Sanya Osha, ed. Vol.xx, No.1-2, 2006, p.35.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Bettina Shell-Duncan, *op.cit.* p.14.

³⁴John S. Mbiti, *op.cit.* p. 140.

separation, the man usually comes back to collect some or all of what he gave to his wife's family. In some cultures if this is not returned, she may never have the right to remarry. This practice has held some women from poor families captive or to stay in an abusive relation thereby intensifying their economic and social hardship.

Feminists have given several interpretations to bride-wealth and consider it one of those practices which commodify the woman. Most of the men who pay bride wealth interpret it as if they bought the women and therefore have the right to treat them as they wish. As Mari Eboh puts it, "bride wealth has a depersonalizing effect on the married woman. It was only when dowry disappeared from the American scene that women began to woe men for themselves, and marriage of choice or marriage for love utterly replaced arranged marriages and the valuation placed on female qualities: meekness and home-abidingness."³⁵ Dowry, therefore, gives the man extreme and total control over his wife and children. Because of bride-wealth, women are considered property by some men. It is for this reason that in some African cultures, upon their husband's death a woman can be inherited along with other properties. The men also believe that after the payment of the bride price, they have absolute authority over the women. The women on their part are defenceless as they cannot negotiate sexual intercourse or the use of contraception.³⁶ They are therefore forced sometimes to have children against their will. Worse still, most women cannot end an abusive and dehumanizing marriage because of fear of stigma, social vulnerability and lack of financial independence.

Some parents on their part see their girl children as an asset as they prepare them for the most suitable suitor. Lindorfer argues that the girl child was seen as a valuable commodity owned by her male family members and later by her husband and his family.³⁷ While the

³⁵Mari P. Eboh, "The Woman Question: African and Western Perspectives" in Emmanuel C. Eze (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, Massachusetts, Blackwell, 1998, p. 334.

³⁶Strube M, "The decision to leave an abusive relationship: empirical evidence and theoretical issues," *Psychological Bulletin*. 1988; 104: 236–250. Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1831942/> viewed on 2/5/2013.

³⁷ Simone Lindorfer, "Sharing the Pain of Bitter Hearts: Liberation and Psychology and Gender-related Violence in Eastern Africa," 2007, available at

girl is still in her father's home, she is viewed as an asset and when she marries she becomes an asset to her husband and his family. Some families have even encouraged their children to drop out of school and get married because of the benefit they may get from bride wealth. Bride wealth has therefore been blamed as one of the main reasons for early and forced marriages.

It is against this background that Levinson considers bride-price as a cultural practice that promotes gender economic inequality, male dominance, divorce restriction and the use of violence for conflict resolution.³⁸ Bride-price perpetuates the culture of male dominance and domestic violence against women.

Widowhood Practices and Inheritance Rights

Widowhood rites constitute one of those cultural practices that are common in African societies. Widowhood is a sudden change in the status of a married woman because of the death of her husband.³⁹ It is a major life crisis as the woman has to face new experiences and challenges. There are many rites associated with mourning, which begins immediately after the man is buried. Adler argues that the cultural practices associated with mourning, bereavement and widowhood, which are varied, are often traumatic experiences for women.⁴⁰ Patrick Okoye contends that most of these widowhood practices comprise of harsh violation of human dignity and has been described as a cultural tragedy.⁴¹ Margaret Pingpoh did a study of the widowhood practices in the Western Highlands of Cameroon and came to the conclusion that widowhood practices in this part of the country constitute severe human rights violation and abuses; all of which compound the emotional and psychological pain at the death

<http://books.google.co.za/books?id=NGrfuwq3se4c=simonelindorfer.html>, accessed on 2/5/2013.

³⁸ Levinson Davis, *Violence in Cross Cultural Perspective*, Newbury Park, California, Sage Publishers, 1989, p.38.

³⁹ Leonore L. Adler and Florence L. Denmark, *International Perspectives on Violence*, Westport, CT., Praeger, 2004., p.197.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Patrick Udeale Okoye, *Harmful widowhood practices in Anambra State: The new millennium strategies for education*. Enugu: Nucik, 2000, p.76.

of a husband.⁴² These practices are very common in the different areas where they are practiced though its intensity may vary from one culture to another.

An analysis of this practice would unveil its violent and inhuman nature. Okoye's identification of these different practices can be categorized under psychological, physical, economic, spiritual and sexual violence against women.⁴³ These include; defacement where the widow's hair is shaved; dethronement or sitting on a bare floor for weeks; confinement; routinized crying; ritual cleansing; levitation; disinheritance and drinking of the water used in washing the corpse, which may be a source of infection and disease. In some societies, in addition to the aforementioned, a widow is forced to go around half-naked for several months.

There are some reasons which have been advanced for widowhood practices. The society considers the ill treatment of the widow as punishment for the death of the husband and for having disobeyed the husband while he was alive.⁴⁴ Sometimes the reason advanced for this excessive mourning is that it is a way for the woman to prove that she is not responsible for her husband's death. This ill treatment is also considered as a test of fidelity for the wife of the deceased, since she has to stay for one year without sexual intercourse. It is also viewed as a cleansing exercise. For many, it is simply a custom and they do it to promote their culture. The curious thing is that these practices are usually promoted and performed by other widows on their fellow sisters. Okoye argues that it is a cultural twist where female groups are invited to perform the activities of male dominance and advance obnoxious cultural practices and beliefs on widows.⁴⁵ The fact that widowers do not go through the same practices that widows go through, has made the practice to be seen as a patriarchal model to subordinate women.

⁴²Margaret Hongwe Pingpoh, "A Country Case Study of the Situation of Widows in the Western Highlands of Cameroon," available at <http://wgc.womvenglobalconnection.org/conf06proceedings/Pingpoh%20M.--%20Situation%20of%20widows.pdf>, viewed on 4/5/2013.

⁴³Leonore L. Adler and Florence L. Denmark, *op.cit.* p.198.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

Polygamy

Polygamy is a common practice in most African societies. Polygamy means marrying many; either wives or husbands.⁴⁶ However, the term has been popularly applied to men getting married to more than one wife, which in the literary sense, is polygyny. On the other hand, the situation where a woman marries more than one husband is called polyandry.⁴⁷ However, we use the term polygamy to apply to the case of the man marrying more than one wife. Polygamy is one of the most common customs in Africa. Mbiti argues that the custom fits into the social structure of traditional life.⁴⁸ According to Mbiti polygamy is good because it helps the man to have so many children thereby increasing his 'immortality,' which means that he will always be reborn in the multitude of his descendants, which also increases the status of the family.⁴⁹ Polygamy has therefore been justified to have advantages for those who practise it.

Miriam Zeitzen has examined the gender dimension of polygamy and the asymmetry it involves. Zeitzen argues that there is always age discrepancy between the man and the woman, with the man usually older than the woman, as well as discrepancy in prestige and power which renders gender equality in polygamous marriages impossible.⁵⁰ There is hardly any equality in polygamous marriages. Because of the differences in marital privileges in such marriages, there is always the possibility of conflict.

Wittrup regards polygamy as a kind of cultural logic in which gender plays a crucial role, where there is conflict between the sexes.⁵¹ This conflict is not only between the opposite sexes but with the same sex as well. This could be seen when co-wives are in conflict with one another. Feminist researchers have associated polygamy with the subjugation of women and have shown that it is detrimental to women, even though the women who practice it may not

⁴⁶ John S. Mbiti, *op.cit.* p.142.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.142-143.

⁵⁰ Leonore L. Adler and Florence L. Denmark, *op.cit.* p.199.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.126.

necessarily regard it as a problem. This may be because of the economic benefit they are getting out of the relationship.

Marriage and Motherhood

Reproductive tasks are very important to African women and they are never inferior to any other role. To women in most African cultures, motherhood is an inherent aspect of womanhood. Being a woman implies being a mother. However, marriage and motherhood have also been described as patriarchal institutions where male dominance is perpetuated. From birth the girl's education is directed towards preparing her for marriage and motherhood. In marriage, the man is the head of the household and the bread winner. The woman is most of the time considered the housewife which is viewed as a profession and it is common to find women fill in housewife in the space allocated for profession in the birth certificates of most children of such women and even on marriage certificates. However, with education, women are beginning to work out of the home, though the inequalities in marriage still persist.

Forced marriage as well as child marriage is very common in some parts of Africa, where girl children are sent into early marriages to pay for debts or to raise money to send their brothers to school. In some African communities girls are betrothed at infancy and get married as early as 7 years. Young adolescents are abducted and forcibly married while others have their marriages arranged by their parents and given to older men. They go through initiation processes and are expected to get married immediately.⁵² Girls who are forced into early marriage are deprived of the rights to free will and consent in marriage, right to or not to engage in sexual relationship, right to control their reproduction, right to education and right to personal freedom.⁵³ When it comes to reproduction, "women are often treated as minors, however, and thus considered incapable of making

⁵² John S. Mbiti, *op.cit.* p.130.

⁵³ Grace Jepkemboi, "Early and Forced Marriages: A Violation of Rights of Women and Girls in Kenya," in *Advancing Women in Leadership*, Volume 25, Fall 2007.

responsible decisions in respect of their own reproductive lives.”⁵⁴ This shows that the institution of marriage in Africa, especially in the rural areas, is not done out of free will but out of compulsion especially on the part of the girl child, making her look like a commodity.

In most African communities, women are expected to be mothers to prove their femininity. In some communities, a marriage is not consummated until the woman gets pregnant.⁵⁵ Pregnancy is regarded as the first seal of marriage. Women do not only want to be mothers, but they want to be worthy mothers by producing at least one male offspring because of the value, respect and love they are accorded for reproducing males. Because of this, when a woman does not get pregnant, she feels guilty and receive public ridicule. Reproductive failure is always blamed on her without thinking whether or not it is the husband who may be at fault. In some cases, as Mbiti argues, the fault may not be her own, but she is not excused in the eyes of the society.⁵⁶ It is because of the stigma, the ridicule, humiliation and social exclusion associated with childlessness and infertility that many African women have been forced to seek assisted reproduction.⁵⁷ From this perspective, the value of a woman is defined by her reproductive capacity and she is valued more if she is able to bring forth male children.

Gender Dimensions of Land Tenure Systems in Africa

Land is an important natural resource and a symbol of power and authority but it is unequally distributed amongst men and women in most African societies. In many parts of Africa, both formal law and customary practices based on patriarchy, more especially, contribute

⁵⁴ Fitnat Naa-Adjeley Adjeley, “Reclaiming African Woman’s Individuality: The Struggle between Women’s Reproductive Autonomy and African Society and Culture,” *American University Law Review*, Volume 44, 1995, pp.1351-1381.

⁵⁵ John S. Mbiti, *op.cit.* p.110.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Mbih J. Tosam, “Biotechnology and the Beginning of Human Life,” PhD. Thesis in Philosophy, University of Yaounde 1, 2010, p.169-170.

to women's limited access, control and ownership of land.⁵⁸ In Nso' in the North West Region of Cameroon, there is this customary slogan which says: "men own the land, women own the crops."⁵⁹ This means that women can have access to land for agriculture, but they do not have the right to sell or give it out to another person without the consent of the competent male authority. Gender and gender relations are central to the hierarchy of land tenure rules, such that even land tenure is gendered.⁶⁰ Since gender relations are largely the product of social and cultural processes, change in material conditions may inflict upon and transform power relations between men and women.⁶¹ So, everything is put in place to ensure that equal sharing is never possible.

The main reason behind the unequal ownership of land is because of the inflexible customary laws of inheritance. Within most of the North West region of Cameroon, women are not allowed to inherit land. For example, when a man dies, it is the son who inherits his property and not the daughter because it is believed that she will someday be married into another family; to her husband's family and allowing her to inherit property will be tantamount to giving away the family's property to another family. Even in predominantly matrilineal societies like Kom in the North West Region of Cameroon, it is the male child who inherits. From these we can say that it is not natural that women should not own land, but the laws of the society prevent or deprive them of this right. When these biased and discriminatory cultural practices have taken place for too long, women and society as a whole begin to view them as natural and even assist in their promotion, and at times may resist any attempt at redress even when it is clear to them that they are being abused.

As a result of such cultural norms and practices that burden and disempower women, "the great potential synergy and collateral abilities of African women" which is greatly needed for the

⁵⁸ Miriam Goheen, *Men Own the Field, Women Own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields*, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin University Press, 1996. p.108.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Miriam Goheen, *op.cit.* p.109.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

development of the continent “remain chained, untapped and unexploited....”⁶²

Are there any Ontological Differences between Men and Women?

Human beings are in two complementary forms; male and female. Like size, skin colour, physical and intellectual ability, and the capacity for affection, the differences in sex are all biological accidents. If there were any substantial differences between the sexes, then men and women would have belonged to two different species. By ontological differences we mean difference in their nature, essence or being. Most arguments which have been advanced for the justification of inequalities between men and women are based on Judeo-Christian tradition as seen in the book of Genesis where God created the man and created the woman from the rib of the man. Webb explains this process of creation to argue for the subtle patriarchy of the creation story and its influence on modern and contemporary culture. Webb argues that the woman is described as the helper; the man names the woman not God; it is the man who leaves and cleaves; God addresses man first while the woman only receives instructions from the man.⁶³ According to Webb, the creation order with man first and woman second serves as the most credible piece of data in support of patriarchy in the history of creation.

Despite the above argument to justify inequality between men and women, there is no doubt that there exists an ontological equality between male and female. Male and female ‘created in the image of God,’ if the biblical account is taken as a fact, this means that they are made of the same substance and share in the substance of God. Pope John Paul II in his description of the first and second creation goes at length to argue that male and female belong to a single

⁶²Ani Casimir et al., “African Women, the Vision of Equality and the Quest for Empowerment: Addressing Inequalities at the Heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Future,” *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 2013. Vol.3, No.4, 466-474.

⁶³William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals, Exploiting the Hermeneutic of Cultural Analysis*, Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 2001, 127-131.

substance and therefore are ontologically equal.⁶⁴ Adam's awareness of his own substance is seen in his description -"this is the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." John Paul II argues that the man after the genetic sleep wakes up as male and female while in the first creation he is created male. He uses man here as a generic term which is a composite with a dualism of sex. There is a somatic homogeneity in spite of the differences in sexual constitution which is bound up with sexual difference. Man could not identify himself with other members of the animal kingdom, but could only identify himself with the woman who shares the same nature and essence with him.

One of the ways of solving the problem of inequality between men and women, as Nkolo Foe contends, may be by considering the woman as a *specific political category* just like a class: proletariat, the bourgeoisie, a race, the minority, etc. and not a biological category⁶⁵ as they have been considered in the past. Considering women as a separate and specific political category distinguishes the woman as a universal subject, though with a distinct personality and identity.⁶⁶ This approach may call for a special attention on the problems faced by women, but have the danger that it may only emphasis the difference between men and women.

It may be wrong to say that women are the same as men, but may be correct to say that women have the same rights as men. This is true since rights derive from nature, and man and woman have the same nature. When God created man, he said: "let us make man in our image and likeness: male and female he created them." (Gen 1:26-27). Both of them have the same human nature made in the image and likeness of God. For this reason they have the same rights. But since they have different personalities (*maculum et feminam creavit eos*), each has the right to have his/her personality equally respected.

For the human being, sexual duality is not an inexorable imposition, but a complementarity and perfection with the other sex. Man and woman are complementary for one another: man, *vir*, is not

⁶⁴ John Paul II, *The Redemption of The Body and Sacrament of Marriage (Theology of the Body)*, *From the Weekly Audience of his Holiness, Sep, 5 1979 – Nov 28 1984*, Vatican, Liberia Editrice Vatican, 2005,

⁶⁵Nkolo Foe, *Le Sexe de l'Etat*, Yaoundé, Presses Universitaires de Yaoundé, 2002, p.12.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

completely *homo* without the presence of woman, nor is she completely human without the complement of man. Every theoretical or institutional separation of man from woman, every pronounced preference of men to the detriment of women, contradicts the very nature of the human being. Man and woman are projected as beings who correspond to one another on the same level and who relate to each other with a word, a smile, tears, and love. The man-woman duality is a total equality when it is a question of human dignity; it is complementarity when it is a question of attributes, properties, and duties united to the masculinity and femininity of the human being.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The debate as to whether women are naturally inferior to men intellectually, morally and psychologically provoked a critical analysis of African cultural values, practices, customs, and institutions, which have not only reduced women to a subsidiary position in society, but have also inculcated an inferiority complex in their relation with men. Though nature and nurture may combine to make women what they are, proponents of nature present sex differences as if one sex, male, is superior to the other, female. This has made feminists to be suspicious of research on sex differences and they have advanced arguments to prove that those differences are very minimal and rather reinforced by societies through their institutions. Diane Halpern argues that even though there may be sex differences between men and women, it does not imply that one sex is better than the other.⁶⁸ He argues that although no one can dispute the fact that male genitals differ from female genitals, it is absurd to ask whether women's genitals are 'superior' to men's and vice versa.⁶⁹ It is important to note that differences are differences, but how these differences are viewed is because of the way they are valued. These

⁶⁷Ramon Lucas, *Man Incarnate Spirit. A Philosophy of Man Compendium*, Circle Press, 2005, pp. 239-240.

⁶⁸Diane Halpern, *Sex Differences in Cognitive Abilities*, cited by Richard A. Lippa, *Gender, Nature and Nurture*, Malwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002, p.2.

⁶⁹Ibid.

differences have made most sexist societies to place more value on the male sex, which explains the discriminatory attitude towards the female sex. According to Francis Fukuyama, sex differences as well as race and skin colour are contingent and accidental characteristics of a human being and should not be the basis of discrimination.⁷⁰

Most of the cultural practices undermine human dignity, which is a very essential aspect of human development or human flourishing. Female Genital Mutilation, child marriage, forced marriage, some widowhood practices as well as obvious and subtle discriminatory practices and customs infringe on the personality of the African woman. All these practices violate the fundamental human rights of women and make them, sometimes, feel inferior to men. Immanuel Kant, one of the most vigorous advocates of human dignity, argues that human beings occupy a special place in nature and should never be treated as means to other ends, but only as ends in themselves. In one of his three maxims, Kant implores us to: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”⁷¹ Women are therefore rational and autonomous beings and should be treated with dignity—they should be treated as ends in themselves and not as means to other ends. They should not be used as a means for maintaining the patriarchal culture.

It may be true that Africa has certain cultural values, which may be cherished and preserved, especially its glorification of motherhood. Women in Africa have many reasons for having children and many children for that matter so as to maximise their security and happiness in a cultural setting where the status of a woman is determined by the number of children they have. When Godfrey B. Tangwa argues that feminism is a Western construct that may destroy the African Culture and defeminise the African woman,⁷² he is making allusions to those positive cultural values that should be cherished and promoted. These values include, but not

⁷⁰Francis Fukuyama, *Our Post Human Future: Consequences of the Biotechnological Revolution*, Farrar, Straus and Girous, New York, 2002, p. 149.

⁷¹Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Trans., James W. Ellington, Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1891, II-429.

⁷²Godfrey B Tangwa, *Elements of African Bioethics in a Western Frame*, Bamenda, Langaa Research and Publishing CIG, 2010, p.23.

limited to communality, respect and care for the old, dressing, belief in the gods and African morality.

Most of the time women's rights are being trampled upon and violence against women continue because of refusal on the part of most developing countries to acknowledge that the subordination of women is a human rights' violation. Discrimination against women still continues on the basis of accidental qualities such as sex differences. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 recognizes the inherent dignity, equality and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as stated in article 1: "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another with a spirit of brotherhood."⁷³

Moreover, if African women are being treated unequally compared to men, it is based on cultural beliefs, values and practices which have become antiquated to our changing world and not because of any intrinsic differences between the sexes. The notion that women are too irrational and emotional to participate in politics or hold executive positions in government cannot be proven scientifically and is being challenged considering the great involvement of women in these spheres today.

Considering the fact that there are no natural differences between women and men which make women inferior to men, but the construction of societies, the following points may be taken into consideration to improve the condition of women:

- i. There is the need for public education in the question of equality between the sexes. And for this to be effective, there is need for an open debate where established cultural beliefs, customs, practices and institutions are subjected to critical scrutiny so that those which debase and violate the rights of women are abandoned. The gender gap between women and men may be reduced if girls and women are allowed access to education. Education is important for the moral and intellectual development and empowerment of any individual. Ignorance is one of the main causes of the discrimination and violation of women's rights in most African cultures today.

⁷³The United Nations, "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," available at, <https://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>, accessed on 3/5/2013.

Education may provide African women with critical tools to appraise, question and challenge long-established abusive norms, practices and institutions setup by the male-folk to oppress and discriminate against them.

ii. Obnoxious and unjustified cultural practices, which are harmful to the woman or other members of the society, should be discussed and revised, and where necessary eliminated. Traditional authorities, the government and individuals need to be sensitised on the harmful effects of such practices, and laws enforced to curb such practices. It is from this perspective that Ani Casimir et al. add culture⁷⁴ to the 12 areas which needed redress for women empowerment recommended by delegates of the 1995 Beijing conference. The 12 points include: poverty, education, health, ending violence, armed conflict, economic disparity, power sharing, institutions, human rights, mass media, environment and “girl-child” education. Ani Casimir et al. argue that culture should be added as the 13th area of concern because “culture forms the historical motif under which women had been both negatively and positively disempowered under an unfavourable gender ideology that affects and determines their gender challenges, needs and aspirations.”⁷⁵ It is also for this reason that they further argue that “the sustainable empowerment of women in Africa must begin and end in culture where paternalism has been seen as a factor of disempowerment. The roots of women’s disempowerment must be sought in the cultural norms and mores of various African traditional societies that have denied them equal respect, status, reward and recognition as partners in progress.”⁷⁶

iii. The gender socialization process at home, in school, and other institutions could be redefined where parents and teachers take key responsibility to avoid sexist differential roles towards boy and girl children. Since the teacher serves as the *locus parentus*, and is fully involved in gender processes, there is need to integrate gender awareness components into pre and in-service training.

⁷⁴Ani Casimir et al., op.cit.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

iv. Finally, there is the need for gender mainstreaming of the school curriculum where school materials, especially in the secondary and high schools, are scrutinised to avoid gender biases in such materials portraying men as superior, and intellectually good in the sciences and women as being weak.

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The Phenomenon of Cultural and National Stereotypes

Peter Takov

Abstract

The ambiguities, nuances and the corresponding tribal and national tensions generated by the spirit and practice of stereotyping have inspired me to undertake this project. Three drives can be articulated in this regard: The meaning, generic causes and perceived consequences of stereotyping, the challenge of the criticality of philosophy on stereotypes, and rising above stereotypes. The consequences of this approach are obvious: a more inclusive understanding of stereotyping, and a heightened awareness of its pervasive character. Lastly, it is my wish that this work disposes all to think in terms of community, common good, human dignity and fraternity.

Introduction

Stereotyping, which falls under the banner of prejudices, typically involves labelling and categorizing people and things in a simple-minded manner and making judgments on the basis of the assumptions we attach to these categories.¹ Stereotyping is the root of many absurdities, misunderstandings and misconceptions, and it is even at the heart of some of the most violent conflicts the world has seen and is still experiencing. For, as soon as we pre-package individuals before we know them; drawing conclusions as if we know them, they shrink; they become diminished, and are absolutely worthless. Stereotyping transcends all areas of human life- social, political, economic and spiritual.

¹ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled and Beyond, Spiritual Growth in an Age of Anxiety*, U.S.A., TOUCHSTONE, 1998, p.36.

Stereotypes begin initially at the level of individual relations and then extend to the level of the tribe and nation, where it involves groups of people. In this sense, they can be regarded as false or misleading generalisations about groups held in a manner that renders them largely, though not entirely, immune to counterevidence. In doing so, stereotypes powerfully shape the stereotype's perception of stereotyped groups, seeing the stereotypic characteristics when they are not present, failing to see the contrary of those characteristics when they are, and generally homogenising the group.² Stereotypes, in favour of one's own group, are technically called ethnocentrism.³

In many countries around the world and in many tribes that exist in these countries, Cameroon taken as a particular example, stereotyping has erupted into violence, which has rendered many tribes enemies to each other, and what more? It has taken the lives of many. In America and South Africa for instance, there is evidence of the damages caused by institutionalized racism; rich versus poor, black versus white, etc. On the basis of labels, many people make hasty judgments, for instance, one categorizes bananas as tasteless simply because one ate a certain type of banana years ago which had not ripened properly; one associates all Bansa people as bad in spoken English, all Wum people as wizards, etc. For some because one is a Christian, it automatically means one must be holy; because one is a priest one cannot err, again some use labels to validate their spirituality by thinking that the denomination to which they belong must be the one and only route to God. Others think that their tribe or country is the best compared to others. Moreover, some people assume that their way of thinking, whether it is about a woman's right to abortion or about prayer in school, has to be always right despite any evidence to the contrary.

² L. Blum, L., "Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis," in *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 33, No.3 (November 2004): 251-289.

³ G. Arbuckle, *Earthling the Gospel*, London, Cassell Publishers Ltd., 1990, p. 149.

Method of Approach

Most stereotypes spring from assumptions of righteousness, borne as it were, of a false sense of integrity and dignity. The indomitable assumptions of those who think they know everything have often proved to be misleading. Therefore, given the divisive and destructive results of stereotypes, and again considering the fact that most stereotypers are so static in their position that they do not welcome any counter evidence, it becomes an issue for philosophy. It is therefore of utmost importance to ponder, in a philosophical fashion, its extent. In this regard, the immediate question that baffles a philosopher is that of the rationality of the basis of the stereotypes.

Stereotypes and the Philosopher

When confronted with a stark clash of values such as happens in a stereotypical condition, one might well wonder whether there are objective standards or criteria by which the opposed philosophies might be evaluated.⁴ The objectivity of approaching such conditions is an issue for the philosopher and reveals the critical nature of philosophy in assessing such situations. The philosopher is not a chief judge who draws conclusions amidst the presence of stereotypes. He simply reflects and brings in a range of useful possibilities as a way out. In this regard, following its method, it goes for the basic foundation of things, for, when things are handled from their basic foundation, many problems are solved definitively.

These are some of the basic questions asked by philosophy: To what extent do we have a moral obligation to people we do not know? For that matter, to what extent do we have a moral obligation to nonhuman living things? How about the environment: do we have a moral obligation to it? What are the ethical legitimate functions and scope of government? What form of government is best? What is the proper connection between religion and the state? Do people have natural rights? If so, how do we know that they have such rights? Where do they come from? What makes one person's list of rights superior to another person's? Is there a God? Perhaps just as

⁴ B. Noel More-Kenneth Bruder, *Philosophy, the Power of Ideas*, New York, 6th Edn, McGraw-Hill, 2008, p. 3.

important, does it make any difference whether there is a God or not? Do ends justify the means? What, if anything is the self? Is a person more than a physical body? Do people really have free will? What is truth, beauty and art? Is it possible to know anything with absolute certainty? Does the universe have a purpose? Does life have a purpose? Is there order in the cosmos independent of what the mind puts there? What is time?⁵ And we can go on and on with the list.

It is possible to go through life without spending a moment pondering about these questions, yet on the other hand it is also possible to do so, given that we are spontaneous philosophers. Nevertheless, an understanding of the nature and direction of philosophical questions, as shown in the foregoing analysis, helps one to discern the various areas where a phenomenon like stereotyping can be best handled.

With a good mastery of philosophy, situations arise in which we must balance our own needs against the needs of others, whether at the level of the family, tribe or nation. This prevents enmity and wars between tribes and nations caused by stereotypes. To forge ahead, it is important to note, as already implied from the foregoing, that stereotypes are not just social issues extrinsic from the considerations of philosophy. It is in this fashion that a discourse on the philosophy of stereotypes ensues; an understanding of which marks a major step in rising above prejudices and hence stereotypes.

As already intimated, stereotypes fall under the banner of prejudice, which is an important factor to consider in itself before venturing on any of its particulars. This is a hermeneutical journey and we shall be guided in this light by the great insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁶ This philosopher was influenced by the treatise, *Being and Time* of Martin Heidegger, who in his treatment of *Dasein* presented it as the only being in the world conscious of its existence. According to Heidegger, *Dasein* tries to understand itself, through the projection of possibilities both of itself and other entities, as well as

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ He was born in Marburg in Southern Germany, (February 11th, 1900 – March 13th, 2002).

the situation in which it finds itself.⁷ Following therefore from this, though from a different angle, Gadamer sets out in his magnum opus *Truth and Method* to show what it means to live in a culture and tradition, to appropriate it, preserve and transform it, to live within it and allow it carry one along.

The Idea of Prejudices

Simply stated, a prejudice is the jumping to conclusion without wanting to consider the facts.⁸ In the Gadamerian dimension,⁹ prejudices are the hidden, unarticulated features or aspects of one's understanding that one inherited and absorbed via one's interaction and socialization into and participation within one's culture or tradition. Tradition could be defined as a body of long-established customs and beliefs (behavioural patterns) in a community or group or people, usually one that is being handed down from one generation to the next. Gadamer uses tradition interchangeably with culture and history, all referring to one's prejudices, which shape one's life consciously and or unconsciously. He lays open the historical nature of prejudices as emerging from one's fore-having. They are founded on something, springing from the contingency of men's lives. Thus, they are grounded. This contingency reveals the primacy, which prejudices enjoy as constituting, shaping and enabling our very being.

In the struggle to establish the importance of prejudices in (the process of) understanding, Gadamer starts by bringing out the history of the word. It stems from the Latin *prae-judicium* (pre-judgment), meaning that which precedes a judgment. In other words, it is a judgment prior to a thorough justification. Thus, prejudices will stand for all those presuppositions, or biases or preconceptions which one brings along as one approaches people of different life situations, tribally or nationally. Inasmuch as prejudices represent one of the conditions for understanding, Gadamer distinguishes between

⁷ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Macquarie J. – Robinson E. (trans.), Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1973, pp.182-185.

⁸ *Earthling the Gospel*, London 1990, p. 147.

⁹ H-G. Gadamar, *Truth and Method*, pp. 239-263

two types of prejudices; the productive and the unproductive. While the productive prejudices make understanding possible, the unproductive prejudices rather hinder understanding and results in what is called misunderstandings. Hence, the recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice offers the hermeneutic problem its real thrust.¹⁰

Prejudices, irrespective of their kind, can properly be spoken of within the context of understanding. It is perhaps in the process of understanding each other, whether at the level of the tribe or nation that prejudices come about, destructive or constructive. Gadamer holds understanding to be an agreement¹¹ with the establishment of a common 'horizon.' This springs from what he calls the 'fusion of horizons.' In this light he writes: "*Understanding is primarily agreement or harmony with another person. Men generally understand each other directly, that is, they are in dialogue until they reach agreement. Understanding is always understanding of something.*"¹²

The horizon is the range of vision which includes everything that can be viewed from a particular vantage point. That is, it is a larger context of meaning in which any particular meaningful presentation is situated. Holding such a stance, it follows that one with no horizon is one who does not see far enough, and so tends to overvalue that which is nearest to him. Nevertheless this does not mean that to have a horizon implies to be limited to that which is nearest. Rather, it means to be able to see beyond it.¹³ Gadamer affirms this when he says that the prejudices we bring with us determine the hermeneutic situation. They make up the horizon of a particular present, and represent that beyond which it is very impossible to see.¹⁴

The "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*) is the point where understanding is actually arrived at, in the process of interpretation. It is the main task of hermeneutics because by this act,

¹⁰ H-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 239-263.

¹¹ J. GRONDIN, "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 38.

¹² H-G. GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, p. 158.

¹³ H-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, G. Barden-J. Cumming (eds.), New York, Crossroad, 1988, p. 269.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

the interpreter cancels the distance between prejudices borne of tradition and the present in which he is living. Thus, as long as understanding implies the “fusion of horizons,” it always involves the formation of a new context of meaning that enables the integration of what is familiar with what is unfamiliar.

Any understanding, whatsoever, he argues, is conditioned by the affections, concepts and practices of the cultural heritage of the participants in conversation.¹⁵ In the Platonic dialogue, Gadamer finds an authentic mode of understanding the subject matter for the present and the future. He expresses this when he says that one sees Socrates giving himself over to the *logoi*, that is to the meaning conveyed by words – the subject matter of the discussion.¹⁶ Prejudices generally have a double bind dimension; the meaning aspect and the feeling aspect:

The Meaning Aspect

This meaning aspect is what is commonly referred to as stereotype. All definitions and explanations of stereotyping which have been discussed already, fit very well into this aspect. By placing people and things into preformed categories, one feels one is controlling a world that threatens one’s sense of order or meaning. What we normally think of as stereotypes involves not just any generalization about or image of a group, but widely-held and widely-recognized images of socially salient groups.¹⁷ For instance, we often categorize whites as intelligent, wealthy, and scholarly; whites on the other hand categorize blacks as violent, lazy, and unintelligent, etc. Again, women are often categorized as emotional, nurturing, etc.; men as drunkards; the Bamileke’s as wealthy; the Mbororo’s as unintelligent etc.

¹⁵ R. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*, p. 180.

¹⁶ H-G. Gadamer, “Amicus Plato Magis Amicus Veritas,” in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutic Studies on Plato*, Christopher S. (trans.), New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980, p. 198.

¹⁷ G. Arbuckle, *Earthling the Gospel*, London, Cassell Publishers Ltd., 1990, p. 147.

Therefore, when we say that group X is stereotyped in a certain way, or that ‘there is a stereotype of group X,’ we generally refer to the recognizable presence in a certain socio-cultural context of salient images of that group; in other words, the presence of associations between a group label and a set of characteristics.¹⁸ In this sense, stereotypes are cultural entities, widely held by persons in the culture or society in question.

The Feeling Aspect

Now, prejudices are not just made up of stereotypes, but stereotypes motivated by strong and often powerful feeling impulses. This feeling aspect forces the prejudiced person to see only what he or she wants to see, even to see things that are not there at all.

Gerard Arbuckle in his book, *Earthing the Gospel*, to support this view, tells the story of two elderly Catholic Ladies in Dublin who were passing by a lawn on which an elderly clergyman was throwing a ball to a dog. One of the ladies said: “that’s the Archbishop of Dublin.” The other lady said: “ah, the dear old gentleman, simple and innocent as a child, playing with a little dog.” The first lady said again: “No! He is the protestant Archbishop, you know!” the second lady responded: “Ah, the silly old fool, wasting time with a dog.”¹⁹ The feeling aspect of prejudice is evident in the second lady’s comment.

What is Wrong with Stereotypes?

The badness is bound up with stereotypes being false and unwarranted-in particular, being overgeneralizations about groups-and being held by their cognizers in a rigid and fixed manner.²⁰ The cognitive distortions involved in stereotypes and stereotyping are a source of moral distortions as well.

It is my conviction that while some stereotypes may have a grain of truth in them, frequently they are too simplistic to capture the subtle difference as well as the similarities in making comparisons

¹⁸ L. Blum, “Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis,” p. 258.

¹⁹ G. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 148.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

and judgments. This is particularly the reason why stereotypes generally have a negative valence. Generally speaking, one observes that there is a total neglect in humankind judgments of questioning “conclusions”- humankind is incapable of distinguishing an assumption from the truth. Again, I firmly believe that the scenario of stereotyping in the world today operates in defiance of the empirical laws of logic and hence pregnant with fallacious overtones. It is a lack of well-formed philosophical minds and there is an urgent need to demonstrate the importance of forming such minds so as to attain maturity in reasoning and assessing situations as they present themselves.

According to Lawrence Blum, two fields have dominated the study of stereotypes: Cultural and Media Studies on the one hand and Social Psychology on the other hand. Cultural and media studies have examined the content of culturally salient stereotypes of particular groups, the processes by which these are historically and socially constructed and disseminated throughout society, and the social functions served by stereotypes. Social psychology has looked at the individual psychic processes involved in constructing, holding, and operating with stereotypes. Both of these literatures, according to Blum, have implications “for the question of what exactly is wrong with stereotypes and stereotyping,” but this normative question, Blum intimates, requires the tools of moral philosophy to give it appropriate focus.²¹ But then, I do feel that addressing the question of stereotypes also requires the tools of other philosophical disciplines. In a more precise fashion, there is the need to master the philosophical sciences of logic, hermeneutics, metaphysics and phenomenology – sciences which are of great importance in disposing one towards a better interaction in society. A tour with these sciences in addressing the problematic of stereotypes portrays the critical spirit of philosophy amidst prejudices – stereotypes. That most stereotypers are not open to evidence already indicates their scepticism towards change, a natural reality experienced by the world in which we live.

²¹ L. Blum, “Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis,” p. 252.

Stereotypes against the Reality of Change

In the ethical and metaphysical domains, stereotyping is objectionable because things are always in a state of becoming. A change normally involves an addition or a loss of perfection, such that the being in question would be necessary and contingent at one and the same time. This last premise is valid only for dependent, limited, and composite beings that we are.²² Hence, by essentializing an individual's nature; one delimits the sphere of individual expression by circumscribing the range of future possibilities. In this regard, we think, for instance that because one tribe or nation hates the other because of a particular characteristic, then that characteristic remains in them forever, even a newly born baby we think, is born with such a property. This is faulty. There is thus a need to remain open and accept the value of change.

Reasoning

A great many of our everyday activities, whether undertaken for business or pleasure, involve reasoning. This is true of draught-playing, investigating the properties of matter, forecasting the state of weather, constructing a philosophy and generally trying to decide what to do, especially in a stereotypical situation.

Situating prejudices in arena of the Enlightenment, Georgia Warnke observes that it has two sources: first from a reliance on traditional views and the denial to make use of one's own reason and second from an over-hasty, non-methodical use of that reason where it is employed. The latter originates from negligence while the former results from blind subordination to authority.²³ From this, one observes that reason and method put together form an alliance against prejudice and tradition in the attainment of proper understanding of the subject-matter.²⁴ It is not much our judgment (about truth or value) as our prejudices that constitute our being.

²² B. Bonansea, *God and Atheism: A Philosophical approach to the Problem of God*, Washington D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1979, p. 62.

²³ G. Warnke, *GADAMER: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, p. 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Logical Considerations

That there is need to be grounded in the science of logic cannot be overemphasized. Logic itself developed from the careful study of the arguments we use every day, and the various ways in which we make judgments. In fact, there would be no place for the development of logic by a handful of experts if most of us did not use arguments in the course of our everyday activities and if we did not respect some types of arguments and reject other types. Simply, one can say that logic rests on the everyday acceptance and rejection of different types of arguments and attempts to exhibit the principles upon which such acceptance and rejection rest, could rest, or ought to rest.²⁵ The arguments in this regard, could be formal and informal. Hence, wherever, in our daily pursuits, we reason or argue or infer we use the conceptions upon which it is based or which the logician studies.

Let us consider a few examples relevant to the herein discourse. Given the statement: "Some apples are red;" The statement is true, but that it is true, is something we know from our knowledge of certain matters of fact concerning the apples we have seen or heard about. This may be called a factual truth.

Consider the second statement: "All apples are either red or not red;" is also true but for a different reason. We can know it to be true without knowing anything about apples and it would be true if we substituted the name of any other objects for "apples." These kinds of truths are called logical truths.

It happens therefore that some people cling to some stereotypes and draw firm conclusions on their bases, not because there are good reasons for accepting it but because they desperately wish it to be true; they may in this regard put forward a bad argument, as it were by accident, because they have constructed wrong sentences in their mind.

The idea of reasonableness or rationality is of utmost importance to philosophy. Philosophers regard their activity as essentially involving the rational supporting statements; they accept that any

²⁵ P. Alexander, *An Introduction to Logic, The Criticism of Arguments*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1969, p. 1.

assertion they make must be supported. The importance of logic therefore in the analysis of our stereotypes comes in to make us know how different kinds of statements differ, especially in respect of the kind of support which is possible and appropriate for them. Then, and only then, can we change our perceptions of how we consider others.

Lastly, people stereotype others and indulge in arguments that could result in the spilling of blood. But then, when asked the meaning of the words we use to argue, they cannot define them, or any details of what they are quarrelling about, we cannot tell. This is one of the reasons for tribal and national tensions caused by stereotypes. If we know the meaning of the words they use to argue and detailed information of our subject matter in the argument, they will not act in a stereotypical fashion. Lack of this knowledge, coupled with lack of the knowledge of proper argumentation are the reasons why stereotypes may themselves be fallacious, or form a bed rock of fallacies.

On the Fallacious Nature of Stereotypes

The term fallacy comes from the Latin word for deceit and it is easy to deceive ourselves into believing that we are making a strong argument when we have unintentionally lost our way. Most people often admit that stereotypes, in whatever form they are manifested, are false. It is false, or at least misleading, to say that a Fulani Man is unintelligent, or that a Bafut man is very crafty and so on. The falseness of stereotype is part of, and is a necessary condition of, what is objectionable about stereotypes in general.²⁶ But then I will say that they are rather misleading and, not strictly speaking, false because they do not state something sufficiently definite to be false. For, to say of all Bansa people that they are poor in spoken English, when there are clearly many of them who articulate very well, and perhaps just a handful who articulate poorly, is not strictly speaking, false, but can be misleading. In other words, statements as such are too vague to admit of ready empirical demonstrations.²⁷ They are hasty

²⁶ L. Blum, "Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis," p. 256.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.260.

generalizations and hence, stereotypes are, or involve, not merely generalizations, but false or misleading generalizations, i.e., overgeneralizations.

From the foregoing and from the definition of stereotypes as categorizing people or things in a simple minded fashion and making judgment about them; that is, judgment which has little or no evidence at all; when subjected to the rules of logic and cogent reasoning, one immediately finds that stereotypes are more than often fallacious, and are often the basis of many fallacies. The following examples portray the logical form of stereotypes:

Logical Form:

*If all "M's" have the property "G" (this being a characterization, not a fact).
and "K" is an "M."*

Therefore "K" has the property "G".

A glaring example in this regard is:

All Bansa People are very tribalistic.

Mr. Nformi is a Bansa Man

Therefore, Mr. Nformi is very tribalistic.

It is important to observe in this regard that the statement "*All Bansa People are very tribalistic,*" is a stereotype, and believing this to be so, is a fallacy. While this may be the case that some or even most Bansa people are tribalistic, we cannot assume this without valid reasons. Moreover, stereotypes such as these usually arise from ignorance, jealousy or even hatred.

Lastly, statistical data can reveal characteristics of a group that are more common than in other groups, which can effect probability of any individual member of the group having that property, but we can never assume that all members of the group have that property. It is therefore of utmost importance to note that people are first and foremost individuals before belonging to group categories.

Given the fact that reasoning itself is a wide subject and logic only handles a facet, when it has to do particularly with emotional and motivational factors, which clearly form the germ of stereotypes,

it becomes the place of the philosophical science of psychology.²⁸ It is, basically speaking, the science that seeks to answer all sorts of questions about us all: how we think, feel and act.²⁹

That a student trained in logic will be able to reason maturely does not make the student a kind of stooge to principles. The simple idea is that such a student has spent much time studying the principles.

Overcoming Cultural Stereotypes

The striking question that immediately comes to mind is: Are prejudices inextricable in human thought and judgment? The answer to this question is yes, owing to the fact that human beings are finite and historical beings and prejudices in the literal sense of the word *form* the initial directedness of our entire ability to experience. That is, they are necessary conditions by which one experiences something, and are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth.³⁰ Thus prejudice is not only something inevitable but also indispensable (Gadamer). It is part of one's being, a specific manifestation of man's historical existence, for the very reason that history does not belong to man but man belongs to history. Charles Peirce, the American Philosopher shares this view when he comments on the study of philosophy:

*We cannot begin with complete doubt (in the style of Descartes). We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. The prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which do not occur to us and can be questioned.*³¹

Flowing from the above assertion it can be understood that there is no situation that is prejudice-free in our daily interactions.

²⁸L. Blum, "Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis," 4.

²⁹ G. David Myers, Psychology, New York, 2nd Edt, Worth Publishers, inc., 1989, p. 4.

³⁰ M. Dona, *Emotional Understanding*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 69.

³¹ C, Peirce, C., in M. Dona, *Emotional Understanding*, p. 69.

Now, despite the truth that our orientation to the world is intrinsically conditioned by prejudices – stereotypes, to which we are a part, and despite the truth that whatever understanding we arrive at when faced with any situation in the world, we do so, on the basis of this background,³² we can nevertheless rise above prejudices-stereotypes. We can be credited as long as the stereotype or prejudice is based on empirically verifiable evidence and one still remembers to treat others as individuals. This makes the difference in our relationships and reduces the tensions between tribes and nations.

An in-depth understanding of the nature and foundation of stereotypes, which has already been discussed, is a major step towards getting rid of them. Again, in a moral sense, it is important to observe that our hasty judgment of others comes not from strength but rather from our own weakness and insecurity. An awareness of this fact disposes us to open up to one another, acknowledging the very fact that man is a social being, and must come to terms with one another in order to live a peaceful life in the society. This entails a recognition and appreciation in a philosophical fashion of many qualities that we humans possess as working tools for positive interaction: dialogue, dignity of the human being, openness to various cultures and the appreciation of the dignity of the human being.

The Dignity of the Human Being

All human beings are persons, and Blacks are not lesser persons than Whites. A person is defined by Boethius as “an individual substance of a rational nature.”³³ This definition is further taken up by Aquinas who in turn considers a person as a complete subsistent substance of rational nature.³⁴ Aquinas and Boethius’ definitions of a person indicate that a person can only be spoken of as an intellectual being; that is, a being endowed with reason. This obviously implies that every human being is a person since every human being is an individual substance of rational nature. This means that one may not

³² P. Healy, “Situated Rationality and Hermeneutic Understanding: A Gadamerian Approach to Rationality,” in *Philosophical Quarterly*, 36, 2 (1996), p. 157.

³³ L. Geddes-W. Wallace, “Person,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol.11, p. 166.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

act as a human or act in an unbefitting way, or may even lose the normal use of one's reason, but one does not cease to be a person. Man by his intellect surpasses the world of mere things.³⁵ The person is thus superior to a thing and has a special dignity. The metaphysical basis of personhood is thus rooted in the substantial act in the intellect.³⁶

In terms of sociality, it becomes evident that man cannot socialize if he is not a political animal; and for Maritain, man is a political animal because he is a rational animal.³⁷ From this point of view, he deserves a dignity which is proper to a person. This argument, therefore, is to stress the fact that all human beings, irrespective of the tribe or nation, undergo the same rational processes and therefore stand in contradiction to all forms of prejudices according to which some human beings are considered superior or better than others. Once the full weight of this argument is perceived, the fallacy at the root of the phenomenon of stereotypes, whether tribal, national or racial, become glaringly evident. The logical inconsistency of that racism and tribalistic attitudes, which have in the past and also in the present, led to colonialism and enslavement and exploitation of some humans by others also, appears in the lamplight.

The Imperative of Dialogue

Interaction is a continuous “give and take” process. Our prejudices are purified as we go deeper into understanding in a dialogical fashion who is who, given the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In this sense, we are not being static, but offering room for reformation and purification of preconceived ideas. The ultimate product is “understanding,” that ensues through a unity of meaning – that of the prejudices-stereotypes that we carry and the truth encountered in the object. The love for, and the promotion of dialogue between tribes and nations, inevitably

³⁵ Vatican II Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965) n. 15.

³⁶ L. Geddes-W Wallace, “Person,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol.11, p. 167.

³⁷ J. Naritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, [J. Fitzgerald, (Trans.)] Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, p. 48.

presupposes and opens the grounds for our disposition to welcome and learn from other cultures.

Openness to Various Cultures

A person, as already intimated, is relational. He is not self-sufficient and as such cannot exist alone. He has potentials which remain undeveloped if he lives in isolation. He lives and acts together with others through whom he becomes aware of himself, actualizes his potentials and attains maturity and self-realization. In fact, man needs others so that he can develop integrally: socially, intellectually, economically and spiritually.³⁸ These others whom he needs are not those tied to his immediate surroundings or tribes, but everyone he encounters at the inter-tribal and inter-national levels.

We can observe that the media particularly promotes stereotyping through movies; music and images of people from other cultures to ignorant and/or uneducated cultures. (Our latest example in this area is the music produced by a , Bamenda Cameroonian Artist, stereotyping girls of some tribes in Cameroon; All Pinyin girls as dirty, All Bansa girls as poor in spoken English, All Kom girls as promiscuous, etc.). Moreover, some nations are portrayed by the media directly or indirectly as excessively violent, when they are not; others as promiscuous when they are not. Fallacious reasoning, and one may add, crooked thinking of this sort, can only be overcome when one attempts to have a personal encounter with the cultures in question in order to have an in depth and thorough knowledge of them. This also presupposes that one is prepared to put away the conceived ideas, contrary to the real situation, which one previously gathered from the pervasive culture of the media and the body of sweeping statements and hasty generalization already floating around.

The story is told of the “black man,” who thought that whites were superior to blacks and feared them to the letter. When he went to Europe, he was surprised to see poor white men and worst still some that were even mad. Also we are very familiar with one of the historical reasons for the emergence of the autonomy of Afro-Americans. They were formerly slaves and used to carry the children

³⁸ R. Charles, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching*, San Francisco, 1999, p. 15.

of whites to the classroom and guard them while these children were being taught. But then, it turned out that the slaves became more intelligent than the students being taught, because while guarding they were indirectly learning. This cancelled the notion from the whites who regarded the blacks as not intelligent and thus created by God to serve the whites. Many of the Africans who were recruited to fight during the Second World War came back from the warfront with a completely different, but purified, conception of the whites.

The Common Good

According to Jacques Maritain, the common good “is the good human life of the multitude of persons; it is their communion in good living. It is therefore common to both *the whole* and *the parts* into which it flows back and which, in turn must benefit from it.”³⁹ This implies that the common good belongs to society as a whole and is different from individual goods. The common good implies that each one would enjoy a fair share of the world’s resources; consequently, starvation, malnutrition and misery would be reduced in society. Essential in this theory is the limit of individualism. If the common good is the end of society, therefore, individualistic and selfish tendencies would be reduced, or better still, eradicated.

With these, the phenomenon of stereotyping can make the promotion of the common good redundant, wherein selfishness and individualism is promoted, because labelling has caused unnecessary tension between tribes or nations. It is the responsibility and obligation of members of the society to promote respect and good relationships so as to advance the common good.⁴⁰ In the face of social inequalities brought by stereotypes, there is thus an urgent need for the understanding of and promotion of the common good. This practically portrays itself in the care and concern shown to others in society and fellow feeling in such a way that the problem of the other becomes our own problem. This, in other words, is love of neighbour which Dario Composta emphasizes when he states that love is the will for the good. He recommends the biblical teaching “love your neighbour as yourself and God above every other thing.” This is

³⁹ J. Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, p. 51.

⁴⁰ K. Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, p. 559.

because, as Composta explains, man is an *alter ego*, a peer; therefore, by loving oneself, I love my image, my neighbour.⁴¹ This is the metaphysical basis for loving one's neighbour. In loving the other therefore, one simultaneously loves one's self and vice versa.

Conclusion

Owing to the finitude of our being and the fact that we belong to history, one cannot avoid experiencing reality with stereotypes, especially those derived from one's culture and tradition. This existential structure of projection as has been portrayed in this write up is inherent in understanding. Thus, people of every tribe or nation tend to think that their way of doing things is right; others' ways of acting are stupid, crude, uncivilized, unreasonable, evil or superstitious. This is ethnocentrism, which in its mild form can be normal, reasonable and can serve a useful purpose. But then, some people are suffering from an overdose of stereotyping, which makes it an issue under consideration given the negative repercussions that ensue from it.

There is thus an urgent need to form our reasoning faculties so as to dispose reason to carry out its work of guarding the adequacy of understanding. Looking at the Jesus of the Biblical Tradition, one sees in him a philosopher in the way he went about his life. Several instances are presented wherein he rode above prejudices: He accepted the Samaritans, a race considered outcasts amongst his own kin (Cf. Lk 10:29-37), (Jn 4:1-42); he associated with the marginalized (Lk 15: 1-3); he dialogued with the elite who rejected him (Lk 7:44); he respected the dignity of women who were considered by his culture as having no place in the society (Jn 20:11-18) etc.⁴²

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⁴¹ D. Composta, *Moral Philosophy and Social Ethics*, p. 114.

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Hard-Wired Homosexuality: Towards Excoriating Some Contemporary Justifications for Same-Sex Marriages

Fidel Tanju

Abstract

Homosexuality, especially in the form of advocacy for same-sex marriages, is gaining prominence in contemporary discussions in the moral, legal and political arena. In fact, contemporary interest in the matter is simply amazing; widespread legalisation of same-sex marriages, and increasingly overwhelming complacency with the whole idea of homosexual relationships. In this paper, I intend to excoriate the two most potent contemporary arguments for same sex marriages. I intend to show that the ontogenetic evidence does not end the whole craze about same-sex marriages. I also set out to show that political expediency is insufficient. When it comes to marriage, as well as any other issues of such magnitude, there are certain a priori considerations that must be made.

Introduction

Mind-sets in the direction of homosexuality as an up-to-standard, both legally and even morally, way of life have risen feverishly. Auspiciously, there are many who still hold it to be a frivolity, especially in the face of the increasing refusal to see homosexuality as anomalous. Homosexuality, particularly the issue of same-sex marriages, has become a hotbed of legal, political, moral and religious debates.

There are at least 14 countries which have legalised same-sex marriages just between 2001 and 2012. These include: the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark¹ voted overwhelmingly in June 2012 in favour of allowing homosexuals to

¹ The first country to legalise same-sex marriages in 1989.

marry in the state Evangelical Lutheran Church – Uruguay and New Zealand.² Many others are expected to do same soon. Why the great contemporary interest in homosexuality and same-sex marriages?

It might actually prove instructive to note that the term “homosexuality” is of modern coinage. When it first appeared in 1869, it was considered “as a category of scientific investigation.”³ Judith Boss pursues this discussion by observing that the belief that homosexuality is out of the ordinary was highlighted by Sigmund Freud, according to whom, homosexuality derived from the inability of a boy to deal with his Oedipal conflict and the sexual attraction to his mother. This definition of homosexuality held sway for decades; and coupled with the alarming prevalence of HIV/AIDS, which was first diagnosed in 1977 among homosexuals, it became increasingly clear to the wider public that homosexuality was a perversion and a mental disorder, ipso facto, intrinsically unhealthy and immoral.⁴

Nowadays, homosexuality has received a lot of attention on the basis of certain scientific and political considerations, especially as these enter into legal and other considerations about same-sex marriages. In this paper I wish to examine, excoriate, rebuke and shame the gigantic and gargantuan genetic, metaphysical, moral (and religious) and political fallacies fundamental to the contemporary justification for same-sex marriages. I will do this from two standpoints. The first would be an examination of the “ontogenetic” evidence and argument. The intention here is to examine the genetic/biological and moral underpinnings and intricacies of these contemporary justifications. At this juncture, and cognisant of the confines of this paper, a consideration of the metaphysics of the will is simply going to be implicit. Suffice it to note that by metaphysics of will is meant the understanding that will power is a fundamental feature of reality, especially reality as endowed with rationality; that will power significantly minimises the causal process in rational

² <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/Europe/Same-sex-marriages-gaining-acceptance-14-countries-where-it-is-legalised/Article1-1062305.aspx>. (Page consulted on October 9, 2013)

³ Judith Boss, *Analyzing Moral Issues*, Fourth Edition, New York, McGraw-Hill, 2008, p. 372.

⁴ *Ibid.*

beings, thereby unearthing the full effectiveness of their freedom/freewill.

In the second place, the political dimension of the contemporary ‘pro-homosexuality’ and ‘pro-same-sex marriage’ argument will be considered. The basis here appears to be the stoutly and shrewdly constructed tradition of political liberalism, especially with the work of John Rawls. This will be carefully studied in view of unearthing its lack of tenability as proper foundation for same-sex marriages and, ipso facto, showing the ‘foundationlessness’ of this whole same-sex marriage fad.

Examining the “Ontogenetic Evidence

On one of our pleasure trips to Limbe, some of my colleagues from Saint Francis College, Fiango, Kumba, started a very heated debate. The motion was this: “Animals also think/reason.” I must admit that this, in its interrogative form, has come up often within the context of many of my classes. My position is that animals do not reason and are not free; they are biologically programmed; they simply respond to stimulus. This view is in line with that of Fernando Savater when he explains that the basic difference between “soldier-ants” (and animals in general), even when they appear ‘courageous’ and ‘heroic,’ and human beings is that while the former are programmed to be so, human beings are not; human beings have freedom.⁵ Disagree with me all you want; the truth is, as James Kalat observes, most of us “raise no objection to a biological explanation” of animal behaviour – birds ‘singing,’ bees ‘hive-dance,’ and dog’s ‘obedience’ of its master – albeit the fact that “we may feel differently about a similar explanation of human behaviour, however.”⁶

The strongest arguments for the ontogenetic explanations – descriptions of how a behavioural pattern or behaviour develops⁷ – and justifications of homosexual inclination and behaviour seem to

⁵ Fernando Savater, *Éthique à L’Usage de Mon Fils*, C. Bleton (trans.), Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1994, pp. 27-28.

⁶ James Kalat, *Biological Psychology*, Fourth edition, California, Wadsworth, Inc., 1992, p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid*, 21.

arise from the idea that certain genetic variations of sexual development necessarily produce certain behavioural ‘abnormalities’. Suffice it to note that the operative word here is not so much “abnormalities” as it is “behavioural”; the point being that certain genetic variations of sexual development necessarily produce certain behavioural patterns. Before going into this, let me set the biological stage.

To all and sundry, and this is consistent with basic genetics/biology, everyone is born chromosomally female; designated XX or chromosomally male; designated XY. It is also more or less common knowledge that the sperm of the father carries 23 chromosomes and the female ovum from the mother carries 23 chromosomes and these unite in conception to become a 46 chromosome cell – the child. “All the chromosomes carry the genetic material that gives us our biological characteristics, but the 23rd pair is the sex chromosomes, usually comprised of one X chromosome inherited from the mother and an X or Y chromosome inherited from the father.”⁸

The aforementioned genetic variations produce what could be referred to a “pseudo-hermaphrodites” or intersex individuals. This refers to individuals with ambiguous genitalia.⁹ According to Richard Gross, these pseudo-hermaphrodites have ambiguous internal and external reproductive structures; they’re born with gonads that match their chromosomal sex.¹⁰ My aim here is to succinctly examine some of these genetic variations, especially as they are purported to condition sexual orientation and behaviour.

The first of these is the complete androgen insensitivity syndrome (CAIS) or the testicular feminising syndrome. This is a variation wherein the prenatal development in a chromosomally normal male is feminised.¹¹ James Kalat explains that these individuals have a typical male XY chromosome pattern albeit a

⁸ N. E. Whitehead & B. K. Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! – Homosexuality and the scientific evidence*, (Revised) Second Edition, Whitehead Associates, USA 2010, 1999, p. 104.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁰ Richard Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, Sixth Edition, London, Hodder Education, 2010, p. 564.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 564.

genital appearance of a female. They have two internal testes instead of ovaries and a uterus.¹² For those with CAIS, the internal reproductive structure of either sex fails to develop, and the external genitals do not differentiate into a penis and scrotum. Yet, these generally have a normal sexual orientation.¹³

Another variation is the congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) or adrenogenital syndrome (AGS) in females. This condition is the result of a genetic defect. It is at the hormonal level. Before the condition is described, worthy of note is the fact that a “hormone is a chemical that is secreted by a gland and conveyed by the blood or lymphatic system to other organs, whose activity it influences.”¹⁴ During the critical period of prenatal sexual differentiation, the adrenal glands fail to produce cortisone, which is their proper hormone. Instead, they release androgens, which act as male hormones. Though this enters the bloodstream of the female foetus too late to masculinise the internal reproductive system, which is already female, it is in time to masculinise the external genitalia. “The result is a chromosomal female with a uterus and two ovaries, but anything from a grossly enlarged clitoris resembling a penis with partially fused labia (resembling testicles) to a fully formed penis and empty scrotum.”¹⁵ Richard Gross observes that the females with CAH are more likely to have bisexual or homosexual erotic interest.¹⁶ Rich Deem postulates that it “has been hypothesized that women exposed to more androgens in the womb tend to express a homosexual orientation.”¹⁷

This appeal to hormonal levels or imbalances has been utilised very forcefully in the explanation of the origin of homosexual orientation, especially in view of justifying same-sex relationships and marriages. James Kalat propounds that there are possible hormonal

¹² Kalat, *Biological Psychology*, p. 446.

¹³ Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, p. 564-566.

¹⁴ Kalat, *Biological Psychology*, p. 416.

¹⁵ Whitehead & Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! – Homosexuality and the scientific evidence*, p 108.

¹⁶ R. Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, p. 566.

¹⁷ Cf. Rich Deem, “Genetics and Homosexuality: Are People Born Gay? The Biological Basis for Sexual Orientation,” in http://www.godandscience.org/evolution/genetics_of_homosexuality.html (accessed 21st of August 2013)

predispositions to homosexuality in men. He explains that some homosexual men might have been exposed to a decreased level of testosterone during a crucial period of their brain development, perchance between the middle of the second month of pregnancy and the end of the fifth month. Kalat further explains that such “temporary, partial decrease in testosterone levels might alter the development of the hypothalamus and other brain structures so that, given certain kinds of experience in childhood or adolescent, these males might have an increased probability of developing a homosexual orientation.”¹⁸

Notice the largely hypothetical tone Kalat uses. Also notice the fact that for this hormonal imbalance to translate into a homosexual orientation, it needs the mediation of other factors, childhood or adolescent experiences. Environmental factors, factors that are neither genotypic nor phenotypic, factors pertaining to nurture and not to nature, must also come into play even in the quantitative genetics of human sexual orientation. The environmental influences on genotypic and phenotypic variance or genetics in general, cannot be trifled with.¹⁹ Besides, since it is not evident how these levels of testosterone can be measured, is there no room for reasonable doubt here?

Then again, these fluctuations/decreases in hormonal levels were attributed to prenatal stress. In fact, Kalat presents the findings of a survey of 283 mothers of both homosexual and heterosexual men. This survey did not let the women know why or how they had been chosen; it made no mention of sexual orientation. The survey simply sought out the variety of illnesses and stressors that the women might have experienced before, during, or after pregnancy. At the end, the mothers of homosexual men reported a significantly greater number of stressful events, particularly during the second trimester of their pregnancy. Kalat himself admits that though these results are

¹⁸ Kalat. *Biological Psychology*, p. 444.

¹⁹ K. Dawood, J. M. Bailey, & N. G. Martin, (2009). Genetic and Environmental Influences on Sexual Orientation. In Y.-K. Kim (Ed.), *Handbook of Behaviour Genetics*, (269-279). DOI: 10.1007/978-0-387-76727-7_19.

definitely suggestive, it is problematic to rely on a woman's memory of 20 years after her pregnancy.²⁰

Verily, researchers have found a link between maternal stress and demasculinizing effects in the sexual behaviour of male progeny. Such was indubitably the case for rats. However, a careful study of the facts as far as humans are concerned – the stress effect study that Dorner, an East German researcher, carried out raised more problems than it solved, especially because of a moderate correlation instead between maternal stress and lesbianism, and this was simply weird since girls are not exposed to a prenatal testosterone surge – reveals that the effect of maternal stress on the development of homosexuality is simply not overwhelming; it is just “another minor factor in the development of homosexuality for a few people.”²¹

Sex hormones indubitably increase or lower sex drive. Hormones may contribute to sexual orientation; however, there is simply insufficient evidence upon which to establish a causal link between hormones and homosexuality. “In sexual orientation, the strongest stimulation appears to come from the mind and the environment.”²² There are actually strong arguments to buttress the claim that “upbringing is far more important than testosterone”; that upbringing is so strong that it can over-ride obvious contrary biological predispositions, and as such, nurture is probably more powerful than biology in the development of gender identity – the sex with which a person identifies,²³ or one's sense of maleness or femaleness.²⁴ This belies the claim that “gender identity in chromosomally normal individuals (like homosexuals) is genetically or biologically enforced.... So it is quite plausible that homosexuality is also 10% genetic and 90% environment.”²⁵

²⁰ Kalat. *Biological Psychology*, p. 445.

²¹ Whitehead & Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! – Homosexuality and the scientific evidence*, p. 135-136.

²² *Ibid*, p. 139.

²³ Cf. Kalat. *Biological Psychology*, p. 449.

²⁴ Cf. J. N. Butcher, S. Mineka & J. M. Hooley, *Abnormal Psychology*, Twelfth Edition, Boston, Pearson Education, Inc. Boston 2004, p. 433.

²⁵ Whitehead & Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! – Homosexuality and the scientific evidence*, pp. 109-112.

Put differently, there are biological factors that *force* a behaviour/response to occur, like the whole ‘reflex action idea’; and there are biological factors that *enable* behavioural patterns. James Kalat explains in reference to the latter case that “a biological influence may make a behaviour possible but not absolutely necessary.”²⁶ In further explication, Kalat has this to say:

*For example, although a pattern of activity in certain areas of your brain may increase the likelihood of your engaging in aggressive behaviour, you may or may not attack someone, depending on the activity in certain other brain areas – the areas that assess the probable consequences of your behaviour. An increase in the levels of sex hormones in your blood may increase your sexual motivation, but your actual behaviour will depend on your past experiences, the current social setting, and other, possibly competing, motivations. The full explanations of your behaviour is still biological...the point is that behaviour, especially human behaviour, is the product of many forces.*²⁷

While completely disagreeing with Kalat when he says the “full explanations of your behaviour is still biological” I agree with him that human behaviour is the product of many forces. Much as biological factors could enhance a certain behavioural response and even produce orientations, humans remain humans precisely because they are capable of freely choosing the acts that they posit.

From Savater’s point of view, “we are not free to choose what happens to us ... but we are free to react to what happens to us in one way or another...”²⁸ We might actually have a homosexual orientation without ever becoming homosexuals or subscribing to same-sex marriage. Engaging in same-sex marriage or any other marriage for that matter, far transcends our biological promptings; requires the deliberate exercise of our freedom/will power even in the face of circumstances that are far from being ideal.

²⁶ Kalat. *Biological Psychology*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Savater, *Éthique à L’Usage de Mon Fils*, 30. (The translation is mine.)

Politically Speaking: Liberal and Same-Sex Marriages

It seems particularly complex to estimate the incidence and prevalence of homosexuality cross-culturally.²⁹ Without meaning to belittle the moral intricacies herein, it appears “easier to simply determine whether a society permits or prohibits homosexuality.”³⁰ Though I shall not go into such claims here, it behoves me to posit that cultural identity and ultimately cultural pluralism, albeit the source of cultural relativism cannot be trifled with when it comes to discussing sexuality, in our case, homosexuality. It simply does not suffice to reject cultural relativism as a moral theory and rest assured that that deals conclusively with the morality of homosexuality. The reality of cultural pluralism makes the matter a little more intricate. With due cognisance of the many ins and outs here, especially issuing from foregoing, I will limit my study to the legitimate hesitation of making homosexuality a “democratic prescription”; making homosexuality or the legalisation of same-sex marriages the criteria for determining a truly democratic polity.

It was, and apparently still is, very fashionable to use population pressure as a justification for a relaxed attitude towards homosexuality. Burton Pasternak, Carol Ember and Melvin Ember observe, in this light, that:

*Policy changes in the former Soviet Union were consistent with this interpretation. In 1917, during the turmoil of revolution, the government encouraged people to have fewer children, and also revoked laws prohibiting abortion and homosexuality.*³¹

Besides population pressure, certain “customary rites of passage from boyhood to manhood”³² also push certain societies to overlook or even encourage homosexuality. Even this does not give room for one culture or polity to prescribe homosexuality to another. This

²⁹ B. Pasternak, C. Ember & M. Ember, *Sex, Gender, and Kinship: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1997, p. 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³² *Ibid.*

brings to mind the recent exchange between President Barack Obama of the US and President Macky Sall of Senegal. While Obama maintained that legalisation of same-sex marriages and recognition of homosexuality was the democratic option, Sall was vehement that his country is not yet ready to “decriminalise homosexuality.”

Unfortunately, the issue is not that simplistic. There are various legal and political considerations that make the issue more intricate; debates that arise in the area of the legal definition and regulation of personal relationships. These debates highlight the idea of political justification or legitimacy, which translate in John Rawls, for example, as public reason versus non-public or comprehensive reasons, in view of riding the political sphere of all perfectionist or comprehensive tendencies that threaten peaceful coexistence in a democratic polity marked by pluralism; by this, Rawls envisages the pragmatically expedient and the ethically prudent.

Let me put this differently. As the trajectory of argument around Rawls’ political liberalism illustrates, it is inappropriate for universal truth claims about the essential nature and identity of persons to be made in determining a conception of justice. The modern democratic state does not have room for any general moral or metaphysical conception to provide a publicly recognised basis for a conception of justice. Political truth is contingent upon deliberation. In a context of axiological pluralism, the legitimacy of deliberative procedures cannot depend on their aptitude to produce true judgments, but only on the equal respect that they manifest or favour.³³ And this is precisely the conundrum that bedevils the idea of liberal neutrality.

Such a stance might rightfully receive the characterisation of ‘anti-perfectionism’ in the definition of Joseph Raz when he says: “the implementation and promotion of ideals of the good life...are not legitimate matters for government action.”³⁴ Granted that one’s gender identity, or sexual orientation, or choice of intimate personal relationships is significantly dependent on one’s comprehensive doctrine – one’s conception of the good life – it seems right to

³³John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (expanded edition), New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.

³⁴Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 110.

maintain that the state or policy makers should remain neutral between types of relationships. Yet one way of doing this – of remaining neutral – is by treating the opposing parties the same, in such fashion that one's actions do not alter the relative positions of the parties. Thusly, instead of inaction, the state policy should accommodate both the homosexuals and heterosexuals without changing, or threatening their comprehensive doctrines on the matter of marriage.

Consistent with the foregoing picture is the view that the denial of marital status for homosexuals or the lack of recognition for homosexual relationships is a paradigm of the evils of inequality that must be uprooted from any real democratic polity. As such, the discussion is not on whether homosexuality is sinful/evil/morally depraved or not. The issue is on whether the recognition of homosexual relationships or legalising same-sex marriages is consistent with certain democratic principles – principles like liberal neutrality and equality – all of which intend to safeguard multi-perspectival acceptability for practical expediency and ethical discretion in view of peaceful coexistence in a polity typified by pluralism.

The foregoing argument actually seems air-tight. Yet a careful study of its 'noumena' – its underpinnings, its core structure, or better still, its foundation – betrays major unsettling issues. It all goes right back to the 'Enlightenment.' Pursuant to the Enlightenment was a certain enthronement of reason. To all and sundry, the Enlightenment is known as a campaign on behalf of freedom and reason as against dogmatic faith and its sectarian and barbarous consequences in the history of Western civilisation. Kant explains in his "What is Enlightenment?" (*Was ist Aufklärung?*) that Enlightenment is a human being leaving his/her self-caused immaturity.

By 'immaturity' he meant the inability to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another, as an authority figure. For Kant, this immaturity is 'self-caused' if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence unguided by another. It was to this effect that "*Sapere Aude!*" – Have the courage to use your own intelligence" became the

heraldic motto of the Enlightenment.³⁵ It was the use of one's unaided reason/intelligence that was the determining factor of their maturity. Ipso facto, values no longer had the benefit of universal acclamation. The corollary of this was a replacement of, or put differently, the attack on the dogmatism of metaphysics, and by extension religion, which provides a paradigmatic case study for exploring the contours of emerging postmodernist thought.

With this thought process came the widespread call to "go beyond" and in some cases forget about the considerations of the 'good,' the true, the 'virtuous' or the values that make a person good – that link to nature (because these will lead back to the dogmatism of metaphysics). Rather, the stress on freedom (and courage) to think for oneself focused philosophical reflection on the means of enhancing this freedom in a way that can ensure a peaceful coexistence of each individual in society – as in the case of Rawls. Otherwise put, there was a movement from the 'ethics of the good' which was heavily metaphysical to the 'ethics of the just' which sought to stress the freedom and rationality of the "mature" human person.³⁶

Then again, the foregoing has held captive the discourse on politics. At best, contemporary political theorists found it exceedingly difficult, if not insuperable, to rise above the suspicious and somewhat abnormal dichotomy of politics and metaphysics. At worst, some found – and many still find – this attempt (to rise above

³⁵Immanuel Kant, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières" MUGLIONI, J. M., in coll. « Les Classique Hatier de la Philosophie », Paris, Hatier, 1999, esp. p. 4.

³⁶ These reflections were inspired by a course on *Introduction to Ethics* by Pr. Dany Rondeau. I also think it befitting to mention that this Kantian project is not an attempt to 'deify' reason as is evident in his Critiques. In fact, Onora O'Neill would have us believe, and I find no reason not to, that there are grounds for suspecting that no ways of organising thinking or acting have unconditional authority, and that Kant cannot have, even if he wanted to, vindicated reason. Cf. Onora O'Neill, O., "Kant: Rationality as Practical Reason" in MELE, A. & RAWLING, P. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 93-109. Also see Onora O'Neill, "Vindicating Reason" in GUYER, P. (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion To Kant*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 280-308; Onora O'Neill, O., *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, Chap. 1; P. Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, Chap. 2.

the dichotomy) not only very problematic but also unnecessary. There seems to be both an unwillingness and inability to renounce the Enlightenment's claim that it is the acquisition of the gift of self-consciousness and autonomy in choice of values and goals that makes the human person fully human.

Accordingly, politics may not be grounded in any 'supra-rational' or transcendental vision of the good or the ultimate. It must be secular rather than religious, and its components (debates, decisions and practices) political rather than metaphysical. In fact, Rawls and his likes are vehement that it is inappropriate for universal truth claims about the essential nature and identity of persons to be made in determining a conception of justice. The modern democratic state does not have room for any general moral or metaphysical conception to provide a publicly recognised basis for a conception of justice. Political truth is contingent upon deliberation guided by Public Reason which must be neutral to comprehensive doctrines of any sort. It is this nefarious albeit general spirit of contemporary political theorising that underlies the political argument for same-sex marriages.

The genuine worry is whether it suffices to make policy exclusively on the basis of 'liberal neutrality,' precluding any metaphysical or comprehensive considerations; whether one can have a proper discussion on human beings without recourse to information about human beings which is *a priori* to merely political considerations. I strongly hold that some kind of 'metaphysics' or 'meta-political' consideration is unavoidable in grounding a worthwhile politics; considerations of the right and just cannot stay pertinent and coherent if they avoid considerations on the good, however intricate these may prove to be within the context of a democratic polity marked by pluralism. Maybe the use of one of the major proponents of liberalism, John Rawls, would afford greater lucidity to my point.

It behoves me to note that the context here is a democratic polity characterised by the phenomenon of pluralism, especially axiological pluralism. Within this context, Rawls explains that justification is not simply a valid argument from listed premises, even if these premises are true; justification is addressed to others who disagree with us and

therefore, must always proceed from some consensus. So to say, it must proceed from premises that we and others publicly recognise as acceptable to us for the purpose of establishing a working agreement on the fundamental question of political justice. It follows that this agreement must be informed and uncoerced, and reached by citizens in ways consistent with their being viewed as free and equal persons. He continues by stating:

Thus, the aim of justice as fairness as a political conception is practical and not metaphysical or epistemological. That is, it presents itself not as a conception of justice that is true, but one that can serve as a basis of informed and willing political agreement between citizens viewed as free and equal persons. This agreement when securely founded in public political and social attitudes sustains the goods of all persons and associations within a just democratic regime. To secure this agreement we try, so far as we can, to avoid disputed philosophical, as well as disputed moral and religious, questions. We do this ... because we think them too important and recognise that there is no way to resolve them politically.... Thus, justice as fairness deliberately stays on the surface, philosophically speaking.³⁷

Rawls' point is that philosophy as the search for truth about an independent metaphysical and moral order cannot provide a workable and shared basis for a political conception of justice in a democratic society. He claims that philosophical controversies and problems like the problem of truth and the controversy between realism and subjectivism about the status of moral and political values are insuperable. Instead by recasting the ideas from the tradition of

³⁷ IDEM, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (Summer, 1985), p. 230, in <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0048-3915%28198522%2914%3A3%3C223%3AJAFPM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0> (Page consulted on the 24th of November 2010). Rawls thinks of metaphysics as being at least a general account of what there is, including fundamental, fully general statements for example, the statements 'every event has a cause' and 'all events occur in space and time'. Cf. IDEM, "Political Liberalism: Reply to Habermas" in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 92, No. 3. (Mar., 1995), p. 137, in <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-362X%28199503%2992%3A3%3C132%3APLRTH%3E2.0.CO%3B2-%23> (Page consulted 20th November 2010.)

the social contract, Rawls intends to achieve a practicable conception of objectivity and justification founded on public agreement in judgment on due reflection. “The aim,” Rawls continues, “is free agreement, reconciliation through public reason.”³⁸

With due respect to the importance of metaphysical doctrines, Rawls maintains that practical exigencies necessitate our forming of a conception of justice that is political and not metaphysical; a free agreement; a reconciliation through Public Reason and not *a priori* principles. For practical reasons too, we shall not go into investigating the strength of this claim, at least not now. We think that the practical thing to do now would be to go back into the Rawlsian corpus and see how faithful Rawls himself is to this important claim – (metaphysical) neutrality. This is precisely what we envisage here.

Ernest-Marie Mbonda explains that Rawls’ preoccupation consisted essentially in examining the conditions of the possibility of an agreement among persons called to co-exist in the same political sphere, while having different visions of the good. Rawls considers his theory as political because of the necessity to establish rules, which are acceptable by all and applicable in this political sphere. This theory, Mbonda continues, is not intended to resolve the theoretical problems concerning, for example, the metaphysical foundations of the values to which people adhere. It is intended to deal with the political issue of co-existence among citizens.³⁹

In this light, Alain Boyer makes it clear that if a theory of justice has to be political and not metaphysical it does not, by that, mean that the theory should not be moral or that metaphysical questions are outdated. It simply means that our divergences (of this order) should not prevent us from reaching a common agreement on the ethical principles of justice.⁴⁰ It is necessary therefore, according to Boyer, to elaborate a constructivist method which enables the testing of different theories not from a global/comprehensive conception of

³⁸ IDEM, “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,” *op. cit.*, p. 230.

³⁹ Ernest-Marie Mbonda, *John Rawls: Droits de L’Homme et Justice Politique*, (Québec, Les Presses de L’Université Laval, 2008, p. 200.

⁴⁰ Alain Boyer, “Justifier la Justice” in Catherine Audard, (éd.), *John Rawls: Politique et Métaphysique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2004, p. 41.

the world but from a minimum acceptable hypothesis; and this is what makes it a procedure of justification.⁴¹

It follows, as Mbonda explains, that there is a complementarity between the right and the good, but more so, the necessity for the conceptions of the good – comprehensive doctrines – to submit themselves to the constraints defined by the right. He quotes Rawls, in this perspective, who says: “we could sum up the issue as such: the right traces the limits; the good gives the context.”⁴²

Verily, moral agents have varied conceptions of the good. Yet the political character of justice enables a reconciliation that makes these conceptions compatible and thus, ensures peaceful co-existence. The political function of the epistemological status of the theory of justice becomes evident. If the theory is political, it is because it is applied in a purely political or practical domain, which does not need to make recourse to the metaphysical doctrines.⁴³

However, it would appear, Mbonda continues, that Rawls cannot escape basing his theory on a metaphysical conception of the human person, considered as “inviolable”. Even on a closed/strict theory of the good, the inviolability of the human person seems to be the minimal metaphysical base that guides the totality of the Rawlsian corpus, albeit the fact that this corpus is designed to be applied to the political.⁴⁴ A closer look at the principle of the inviolability of the human person, according to Rawls, brings more lucidity to our present study.

The Principles of the Inviolability of the Human Person

This principle, as Emmanuel Babissagana postulates, has as its precursor the Kantian conception of the dignity of the human person. According to Kant, Babissagana continues, only that which has a price is susceptible to being exchanged, or converted into cash

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Rawls as cited in Mbonda, *op. cit.*, p. 201. (The translation is ours.) This priority of the right over the good in justice as fairness turns out to be a central feature of the conception. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 31-32; *IDEM, Political Liberalism*, p. 173.

⁴³ Mbonda, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

according to its market value; only that which has a price can be considered as a means, a thing. However, precisely because the human person is autonomous⁴⁵ and reasonable, is capable of “self-prescription” of laws of action, and is capable of morality, this human being has no price. Thus invested with such dignity, the human person can in no way be the object of transactions, of economic or political haggling. On the contrary, the human person should always be treated as the measure and as such, the end of all haggling.⁴⁶

It is this principle of the unconditional respect of the dignity of the human person as understood by Kant that Rawls seems to re-appropriate in the opening pages of his *A Theory of Justice*. In its Rawlsian formulation it runs:

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. Therefore in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by

⁴⁵ The whole of Kant’s moral theory is based on the idea of autonomy considered as the supreme principle of morality. The resolutely deontological orientation of Kant’s moral argument is based on an aspect of rationality (the basis of autonomy) and has to do with our consciousness of rules or laws of behaviour, which we consider both universal and necessary. The qualities of universality and necessity are the marks of *a priori* judgements, and this further confirms Kant’s view that the principles of behaviour are derived by the practical reason *a priori*. Instead of searching for the quality of goodness in the effects of our actions, Kant focuses upon the rational aspect of our behaviour. For Kant the major test for a moral act is, whether its principle can be applied to all rational beings and applied consistently. It follows that for Kant, it is universality that stands as the criterion for morality; a universality which falls back on the notion of autonomy – rationality. Cf. Stumpf & Feiser, *op. cit.*, p. 297; Mbonda, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Babissagana, *L’Interdit de la Torture en Procès?* (Bruxelles, Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 2006, p. 90; *Fondations de la Métaphysique de Mœurs*, in Emmanuel Kant, I., *Métaphysique de Mœurs I*, Renaut, A. (tr.), (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1994), p. 18; *IDEM, Fondements de la Métaphysique des Mœurs*, Muglioni, J. (tr.), (Paris, Bordas, Coll. « Univers des lettres », 1988).

*justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interest.*⁴⁷

The form of this formulation is quite instructive. The logical connectives “for this reason” and “therefore,” which are used there, suggest that the principle of the inviolability of the human person is posited as the premise from which a few things can be inferred. Firstly, the anti-sacrificial character of the principle can be inferred. This is what puts Rawls’ theory completely at variance with the principle of utility. The second inference can be considered as an explanation of the first: namely, the absolute and definitive (one cannot depart from) guarantee of the rights and liberties, which result from the first inference.⁴⁸

Above and beyond, it is important to note that an analysis of the foregoing quote shows that the cornerstone from which Rawls builds his whole theory is the principle of the inviolability of the human person. In this light, Mbonda posits that the aforementioned analysis “shows that one would be incapable of explaining the refusal to sacrifice the rights of some people for the benefits of the well-being of a group without/except by reference to the non-negotiable safety catch which constitutes the principal idea of the inviolability of the human person.”⁴⁹

Babissagana follows Mbonda in making reference to Francois Ost who considers this postulate – the inviolability of the human person – as the starting point of Rawls’ theory. They both cite him thus: “This is the true starting point of the theory: not a conception, which is determined by social good, but justice safeguarding morality, the inviolability of the human person...”⁵⁰ Rawls has maintained variously that the nature of his theory is political and not metaphysical. Yet, the nature of this principle that is the starting point

⁴⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition, Massachusetts, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 3-4. Hereafter cited as Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (1999).

⁴⁸ Mbonda, *op. cit.*, p. 97; Babissagana, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

⁴⁹ Mbonda, *op. cit.*, p. 97; Babissagana, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁵⁰ Babissagana, *op. cit.*, p. 92. (The translation is ours) Also cf. François Ost, *Théorie de la Justice et Droit à l'Aide Sociale, in Individu et Justice Social*, Paris, Seuil, 1988, p. 247.

of his theory – at least to the foregoing three and us too – is not utterly clear. Depending on whether it is political or metaphysical, it would affect Rawls' claim of metaphysical neutrality. It therefore becomes imperative that we make a study of its nature in order to ascertain whether or not it is political or metaphysical.

The Nature of the Principle: Political or Metaphysical?

To begin with, it is important to note, as Mbonda rightly does, that all of Rawls' effort is to avoid the approach found in perfectionist, intuitionist and even utilitarian doctrines, which posit a transcendental and anterior conception of the good. These doctrines end up questioning the very autonomy of moral subjects, the faculty they might have to construct by themselves their own rules of political life, from a deliberative procedure, which is put in place.⁵¹

It is to this end that Babissagan observes that without the principle of inviolability of the human person, the contractualism of the original position is transformed into a form of utilitarianism in the sense that its initial axiom becomes similar to that of utilitarianism: it puts on stage the mutually exclusive/separated/disconnected individuals.⁵² Therefore, it is the recourse to this principle that separates the utilitarians from Rawls.⁵³ It is this principle that provides the real solution to the problem of social and political justice in the Rawlsian approach.⁵⁴ All these are in view of demonstrating the primacy of this idea. Yet, as aforementioned, Mbonda claims that this principle is the metaphysical basis on which the totality of the Rawlsian corpus stands.⁵⁵

We find particularly instructive here, the remark made by Mbonda in the Philosophy of Rights class of the First year students

⁵¹ Mbonda, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁵² Babissagana, *op. cit.*, p. 100. It should be remembered that in the Rawlsian theorising, as with that of Kant, it is universality that makes for morality. Thus, return to individuality, in such terms would remove the wedge between Rawls and the utilitarians.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Mbonda, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

of the Masters degree in Classical Philosophy on the 11th of May 2010, while making a critique of the claim of the liberals that the just has priority over the good. Basing himself on the Rawlsian notion of human rights (*droits de l'homme*), he made a remark that is at once simple in appearance and yet profound in implication. He said that the notion of “rights” could be political, so to say, could issue from political debate (*a posteriori*). On the contrary, the notion “human” is presupposed in this debate (it is *a priori*); it is that metaphysical presupposition on which it is necessary to base the political discussion. It therefore goes to show that no matter how much Rawls tries in this era of post-metaphysics to divorce his doctrine from any metaphysical presupposition, his concept of human rights betrays a hidden yet necessary metaphysical basis. It is in the same light that we can say his idea of inviolability of the human person also betrays a hidden albeit necessary metaphysics: because the notion of human person is inevitably metaphysical, since it precedes and is not a matter of political debate as Rawls himself maintains.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Rawls differs with this view. Despite the position it occupies on the threshold of his theory, in spite of its structure, which indicates that it is the premise from which all the normative implications of the inalienable rights and liberties flow, Rawls contests the view that the principle of inviolability of the human person stands as the starting point or cornerstone of his constructivism. Babissagana further explains that Rawls' constructivism is intended to rest on non-metaphysical foundations. Whereas the notion of the respect for human dignity – the principle of inviolability – comes from a particular and metaphysical conception of the person, susceptible as such to being rejected by one who does not share it. This is precisely why it cannot, for Rawls, constitute the starting point of his theory.⁵⁷

It seems that we have reached an impasse here. On the one hand, as we saw from the analysis of the Rawlsian text, the principle of inviolability stands as the minimal metaphysical basis on which the

⁵⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1999, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷ Babissagana, *op. cit.*, p. 98. Worth remembering is the fact that all along Rawls has been trying to propose a theory that rises above the particular and that can be accepted by everyone without prejudice.

whole Rawlsian corpus is built. The corollary of this is that while Rawls aims at building a metaphysically neutral political theory of justice, he inevitably makes use of a metaphysical notion as cornerstone: this notion gives him internal consistency and raises his theory above utilitarianism. In this case, his principles of justice are derived from this metaphysical principle. On the other hand, Rawls himself claims that it is from the conception of justice arrived at in the original position that we derive the sense and content of the idea of the inviolability of the human person.⁵⁸ If we grant this, it would follow that if the conception of justice, which clarifies or gives sense to this principle, is a political conception of justice – and thus its conception of the person also a political one⁵⁹ – then there would be nothing metaphysical about this notion. Of course, unless we want to claim that a political conception of justice (or an *a posteriori* conception of the person) would produce a metaphysical idea of the dignity of the human person (an *a priori* conception of the person). This is manifestly untenable because the political cannot produce the metaphysical, at least not in these terms.⁶⁰ *Nemo dat quod non habet* – no one can give what they do not have.

⁵⁸*ibid.* Here, he cites Rawls when he contends that the idea according to which we have to treat people as ends in themselves and not as means evidently calls for explanation. How can we always treat everyone as an end and never simply as a means? Is it even realisable? In the interpretation of contract tradition, treating people as ends in themselves implies, at least, treating them in accord with the principles which they will consent to in the original position of equality. In this case therefore, people are represented in an equal manner, as moral persons who consider themselves as ends. The principles which they will adopt will then be rationally designed to safeguard the claims of their person. As such the contract theory defines the manner of understanding how persons should be treated as ends and not just as means. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁵⁹Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 29-35. Here Rawls explains that an interpretation which claims that a metaphysical doctrine of the person is presupposed is mistaken. He goes further to elucidate that the idea of freedom does not indicate that a metaphysical doctrine is presupposed.

⁶⁰ That notwithstanding, the status of the 'person' seems to be masked and opaque. This call to mind what Oscar Wilde said: "The truths of metaphysics [in this case the truth of persons] are the truths of masks." (Oscar Wilde, "The Truth of Masks: A Note on Illusions" in Foreman, J. B. (ed.), *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, New York, Harper & Row, 1989, p. 1078.) We find it fit here to avail ourselves of some etymological data on the notion 'person' in an attempt to unmask it. Both the Greek '*prosopon*' and the Latin '*persona*' target complementary aspects of the person. The Greek emphasises the look or the face of the human

However, this Rawlsian claim is not decisive. In fact, the principle of inviolability of the human person is presented even before the Rawlsian construction of the contract procedure in which this principle is claimed to get its meaning. The principle precedes the construction (by the partners in the original position) of the principles of justice in charge of giving it sense.⁶¹ How then can we explain this order, this anticipation, except by a pre-comprehension of the sense of the inviolability of the human person, a presupposition of its validity, of its absolute accuracy?⁶²

It is precisely this anticipatory – or *a priori* – nature of the principle that accentuates its metaphysical character; which character in turn elevates Rawls' theory above that of the utilitarians, and justifies his fight against utilitarianism, which fight is the very aim of writing his *A Theory of Justice*.⁶³ Per se, it may not be out of place to say that this is the 'hidden metaphysics' that underlies the Rawlsian corpus. In fact, without this metaphysical or better put, 'meta-

being; the root *ops* comes from the verb 'to see' and 'be seen'. Thus the Greek stresses the face, the revealer of meaning. The Latin emphasises the activity of speech. '*Personare*' means to sound or speak through. Naturally, it came to denote the dramatic character, then the forms of address (first, second and third person), then a legal status and then again the human substance capable of freedom and responsibility/endowed with rationality – and thus the other spiritual beings. While the Greek emphasises the face as the meaningful display of the person (and this also calls to mind Levinas' phenomenology of the face), the Latin stresses speech and communication. Both conspire to highlight the special dignity of the human being but they do so in such a way that they point to two complementary features of that dignity. In fact as if to sum this up, Levinas says "Language as an exchange of ideas about the world...presupposes the originality of the face without which ... it could not commence." When all is said and done, it becomes clear that the notion 'person' seems more metaphysical than political. Boethius, "A Treatise against Eutyches and Nestorius" in *The Theological Tractatus and The Consolation of Philosophy*, Steward, H. F. & Rand, E. K. (trs.), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968, pp. 84-91; K. Schmitz, "The Geography of the Human Person" in P. O'Herron, (ed.), Reprinted in *The Texture of Being: Essays in First Philosophy*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 146-167; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 91, a. 3 ad 3; Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Lingis, A. (tr.), Boston, Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 202. Also cf. IDEM, *Outside the Subject*, SMITH, M. (tr.), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987.

⁶¹ Babissagana, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Rawls, J., *A Theory of Justice*, 1999, p. 3.

political,' basis the Rawlsian constructivism would itself not rise above the ground.

In our present context, one important meta-political principle which we should bring to bear on the idea of marriage issues from the idea of 'reproduction'. The simple truth is this: "Much of human social structure is rooted in relatively stable reproductive relationships between women and men. We would not have families and kinship without sexual reproduction and relatively stable, mated relationships."⁶⁴ If this anticipatory consideration is not made, society, family and kinship, and ultimately humanity would be destroyed by the institutionalisation of homosexuality via same-sex marriages. We must bear this in mind before we begin any theorising on the politics of homosexuality – the legal definition and regulation of personal relationships. Even political expediency or other 'purely political' considerations cannot do away with this.

Besides, Brian Clowes makes a study of same-sex marriage that I find particularly instructive. Among other things, he has this to say:

*Finally, the homosexual lifestyle is absolutely deadly from a health viewpoint. It has been said that "God always forgives, man sometimes forgives, but Nature never forgives." This is certainly true with homosexuals, whose rates of suicide, murder, domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, and sexually transmitted diseases are all much, much higher than for the rest of the population... [homosexuals] live shorter and unhappier lives on earth as well.*⁶⁵

This is definitely catastrophising. Yet, I agree with the main point Clowes is making: same-sex marriage is deadly – it ultimately kills the society, by trivialising the meta-political idea of procreation, which idea is and should be antecedent to any debate in the area of marriage in conjunction with the idea of love and unity of the spouses.

⁶⁴ B. Pasternak, C. Ember & M. Ember, *Sex, Gender, and Kinship: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Brian Clowes, *A Pro-Life Pastoral Handbook*, Virginia, Human Life International, 2010, pp.82-82.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that in many cases, it is alleged that homosexuality is simply an occult or secrete society practice/requirement. I shall not go into this here. I simply set out to do two things corresponding to the two main parts of the paper. The idea postulated in the first part is this: the ontogenetic evidence (cause) is insufficient to produce homosexuality (effect) and so grant legitimacy to same-sex marriages. In the second part, the claim was that the strongest political argument for same-sex marriages seems to come from a certain political tradition – political liberalism. The somewhat most refined and robust presentation of this tradition, that of John Rawls, was succinctly presented and excoriated, thereby removing/destroying the political foundation of the same-sex marriage craze.

In consistency with my trajectory, once the ontogenetic argument and the political argument have been dealt with, it now remains simply to reassert the metaphysics of marriage. Though this rejects completely the idea of a same-sex marriage, those with homosexual orientations still remain human beings and as such, deserve our love, respect and support so as to properly deal with this difficult anomaly – their homosexual orientation.

Edward Sri makes a very commendable study of John Paul II's "Theology of the Body" wherein he unearths with unquestionable limpidity the metaphysics of marriage or what he calls "God's Plan for Love and Marriage." Among the many salient points he makes is the fact that the original plan for marriage and the profundity of the unity involved was for a man and a woman to experience self-giving love.⁶⁶

The marital act, sexual intercourse, is meant to express a deeper personal union, a personal intimacy between the man and the woman as they give themselves to each other in this self-giving love that characterises marriage.⁶⁷ John Paul II calls this "the spousal meaning of the body...the power to express love: precisely that love in which

⁶⁶Edward Sri, *God's Plan for Love and Marriage: John Paul II's "Theology of the Body,"* New Haven, Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, 2008, p.8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 10.

the human person becomes a gift and through this gift – fulfils the very meaning of his being and existence.”⁶⁸

I am acutely aware of the fact that I have not ventured into the project of offering any definition of marriage so far. This has largely been because most of the definitions associated with this issue are built on legal, political, religious or other ideological technicalities, which blur clarity and make the ethical task all the more convoluted. However, I cannot end without strongly maintaining that marriage is a kind of relationship whose communion/fellowship is deepened by a bodily union of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. As such, sex in marriage rises above a physical activity whose goal is the derivation of pleasure or the satisfaction of one’s sexual desires.⁶⁹ Marriage, and its proper activity, sex, are the means by which the spouses deepen their commitment to each other, and participate in the Divine act of creation through their openness to procreation – an idea which cannot be trifled with without gravely violating the dignity of marriage. As such, not only must marriage be heterosexual, but it is essentially the union of one man and one woman. Yes, the idea of “one man and one woman” is a very arguable one. That notwithstanding, it seems both valid and sound to argue that the metaphysics of marriage excludes the possibility of a “same-sex marriage”.

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⁶⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created them: A Theology of the Body*, Boston, Pauline Books & Media, 2006, pp.185-6.

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Anthropocentric Poetics and the Deconstruction of the God/Man Binary: Humanist Connectives in the Poetry of Thomas Hardy and Robert Graves

Peter Foinjong Awob

Abstract

Literature and Philosophy are often considered as compatible bedfellows. Philosophical postulations have continued to inform and inspire poets in varying degrees at various times and places even though Plato advocated that poets be banished from his ideal republic. It is, therefore, in this dimension that this paper gives a philosophical background to Thomas Hardy's and Robert Graves's depiction of God in selected poems. Informed by Psychoanalytic and Deconstructive theoretical standpoints, the paper revolves around the argument that Hardy's and Graves's world views are couched in anthropocentric philosophies. Thus, it demonstrates that the poets' humanist connective is largely atheistic as evidenced by their deconstruction of the God/man binary and their scepticism towards the Christian religion that upholds God.

Introduction

The main thrust of this paper is to contextualize Thomas Hardy's and Robert Graves's poetry within the framework of anthropocentric philosophy by foregrounding the humanist connectives that characterize the poets' world views. In this dimension, the paper highlights the poets' perception of human potentials as the most essential force behind existence (anthropocentrism). This perception translates into humanist secularism at the expense of spiritual consciousness. Hardy's sympathy towards people emanates from the fact that he considers people as a helpless lot, subservient to what he variedly refers to as "Immanent Will," "Automaton," "Wheel," "Hand," "Crass Casualty" or "Chance". Graves's concern

for human dignity makes him question the authority of the Christian God who cannot bring an end to human suffering. The two poets apparently contend that human beings have the latitude to seek fulfilment through “loving kindness” directed to humankind rather than by paying allegiance to a supernatural being with the hope of recuperating spiritual recompenses in an afterlife utopia. The poets’ attitudes are concordant with Kenneth Phifer’s explanation, expressed in an online article entitled “The Faith of a Humanist,” that:

*Humanism teaches us that it is immoral to wait for God to act for us. We must act to stop the wars and crimes and the brutality of this and future ages.... We have a high degree of freedom in choosing what we will do. Humanism tells us that whatever our philosophy of universe may be, ultimately the responsibility of the kind of world in which we live rests with us.*¹

The above excerpt prioritizes individual freewill at the expense of Divine intervention. The poets’ vision fits within the framework of secular humanism. However, inasmuch as they reject God and the Christian religion that hails Him as the ultimate remedy to human problems and the provider of a blissful everlasting life hereafter to adherents, the poets call on people to explore their human potentials. One is, therefore, bound to ponder over the following concern: How does Hardy’s and Graves’s poetry fit into the scope of humanism?

In order to address the above worry, this paper hinges on the assumption that Hardy’s and Graves’s world views are couched in anthropocentric philosophies. To justify the above conjecture, I shall focus my discussion on the poets’ secularism, especially their agnostic and atheistic propensities. My analysis will be guided by Carl Gustav Jung’s assertion that “Every creative person is a duality or a synthesis of contradictory aptitudes. ... Since as a human being he may sound morbid, we must look at his psychic make-up to find the

¹ Kenneth Phifer, “The Faith of a Humanist,” August 8, 2007 available at <http://www.jcn.com/humanism.php4> (accessed on

determinants of his personality.”² By calling for the critic to focus on the psychic rather than the spiritual or supernatural side of the writer, Jung insinuates that humanistic tendencies are at the centre of the poets’ religious scepticism, a situation that makes them seek to deconstruct the God/man binary in their poetry. The paper is divided into two parts. The first focuses on Hardy’s depiction of the God/man binary while the second handles Graves’s religious scepticism.

The Humanist Connective in Hardy’s Poetry

Hardy’s rejection, doubt and questioning of the Almighty God falls within the context of the humanist view that human beings can ameliorate their lot through their personal effort and not through the benevolence of a supernatural being. The rejection of God is accompanied by the denouncement of the Christian religion which, according to the poet, has derailed from its objective of ensuring moral goodness. Thus, he hails scientific progress aimed at bettering the human condition. This is in line with Hardy’s philosophy of meliorism as illustrated in the following analysis.

In the poem “God-forgotten,” God, who is referred to as “Lord Most High,” is remotely conscious of ever creating the human race. The speaker retells his discussion with the Lord when he was sent by the “Sons of Earth” to present their plight to Him. God doubts if He ever created the earth and is surprised to hear that human conditions were deplorable.

The surprise and confusion that clouds God’s attitude when the speaker reminds Him of His own creation is ironic and aimed at ridiculing the idea of the immanent nature of God. If God were everywhere as the Christians claim, He would not wait to be informed of the suffering of His own creation. Hardy questions God’s ability now to command the cessation of human suffering just as He commanded the process of creation. It is as strange, as it is sad, that God cannot “heed” the call of the Earth. Hardy’s humanist

² Carl Gustav Jung, “The Poet” in *The Norton Reader*, 5th ed. Ed. Arthur M. Eastman, New York, Norton, 1980. p. 405.

sentiments are strongly expressed at the end of the poem which captures God's vain command for the end of human misery:

Hence, Messenger! And straight away put an end
To what men undergo."...
Homing at dawn, I thought to see
One of the messengers, standing by.
- Oh, childish thought!... Yet often it comes to me
When trouble hovers nigh.³

Despite the glimmer of hope, it is unfortunate that the command is powerless as the speaker still returns to witness the same precarious condition of his existence. This situation conveys the futility of hope through the anguish cry of the speaker, "Oh childish thought!"

"Nature's Questioning" also expresses Hardy's disregard for God. The persona communicates the distresses of Nature's creatures who do not understand the *raison d'être* of their hopeless existence. The creatures question:

Has some vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blend,
But important to tend
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?
Or come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pain?...
Or are we live remains
Of Godhead dying down wards, brain and eye gone now?⁴

The poet's rhetorical propensity signals a virulent attack on the insensitivity of the Christian God to the plight of humanity. In the words of Satoshi Nishimura, Hardy uses "figurative substitution for the unknowable, God being only one of the many possible signifiers for this concept [of the Godhead]." Other signifiers are "Vast

³Thomas Hardy, *Selected Poems* (Hence SP), Walford Davies (ed.) London, J.M. Dent, 1982, p.17.

⁴ SP, p.50.

Imbecility,” “Automaton,” and a ‘High Plan.’”⁵ By reducing God to these variables, Hardy undermines God’s position as the centre of all creation. The weakened power of God is emphasized through the expression “Godhead dying downwards.” There is little or no hope of remedying the gradual but obvious decline of God’s power as the alliterative /d/ in “dying downwards” suggests. At the end of the poem, “...Earth’s old glooms and pains / Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbours nigh.” This is further evidence that human beings should not rely on supernatural forces for redemption but should explore their human potentials to redeem their value.

In “A Plaint to Man,” the persona – God – acknowledges that man, “slowly emerged from the den of Time / and gained percipience as [he] grew.”⁶ This statement, at once, brings to mind Darwin’s theory of the evolution of species. The act of “gaining percipience” is reminiscent of Darwin’s belief that in the process of growth, species develop stronger characteristics that are bequeathed to the young. Moreover, by making God the helpless speaker of the poem and a creation of humanity, Hardy creates a reversal of roles with God at the mercy of humanity. The speaker questions why man created Him and discloses that He was “framed” out of human necessity to overcome despair “In the minds of men when shadows scare.” Given the present worsening human conditions, God does not find favour in the eyes of His creators as He laments that He “...dwindle[s] day by day / Beneath the decide eyes of seers.” With God dethroned from His almighty position, humanity can now comfortably face:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart’s resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced
With Loving-Kindness fully blown
And visioned help unsought, unknown.⁷

⁵Satoshi Nishimura, “Thomas Hardy and the Language of the Inanimate”. *English Literature* 1500-1900. Autumn 2003. Vol 43. 897 (17), p. 8 June 17, 2007, Thomson and Gale Database. www.britishcouncil.org/cameroon.

⁶ SP, p.17.

⁷ SP, p.18.

Since God is “framed” out of “despair,” it is but normal that He comes under serious questioning when he fails in the very duty for which He was conceived to achieve. That is, the duty of ameliorating the deteriorating human condition, symbolized by “shadows”. The demise of God is evoked in the expression “deicide” – the killing of deity. This act is justifiable as it opens the way for truth to prevail, and truth, in this light, is nothing but humankind’s dependence on the dictates of his heart, a situation which creates room for fraternity rooted in “loving-Kindness”. Hardy’s doctrine of “loving-Kindness” evokes memories of William Blake’s poem, “The Human Abstract”. Like Hardy, Blake had expressed similar humanist concerns when he declared that humanity would have been void of “pity,” “if we did not make somebody Poor: / And mercy no more could be / If all were as happy as we.”⁸

Hardy’s vision falls within the framework of the humanists’ disposition of bettering the world. In a bid to expound on this humanist idea of bettering the world, David Weissband intimates that improvement of the earth does not merely require us to “retreat to our own little garden.” Weissband explains that “there is a larger world out there theoretically the smaller our focus, the more secure we can be.” But, he wonders, “Can we be secured while others are denied gardens or while others pollute the air or the water?” After raising these concerns, Weissband concludes that it is insufficient to withdraw into a shell and try to cause no harm because our responsibility is guided by the fact that “we are part of a human community; we depend on it, it depends on us.”⁹ Weissband’s view complements Nietzsche’s longing for an *ubermensch*, an embodiment of universal goodness embedded in people rather than in spiritual beings.

Another manifestation of Hardy’s humanism is his resolve to enjoy himself as much as he can while he lives, rather than entertain forlorn hopes for a paradisaal dome hereafter. This resolution is taken

⁸William Blake, “The Human Abstract” in *Literature of the Western World: Neoclassicism Through the Modern Period*, Vol. II. 2nd Ed. Brian Wilkie and James Hurt, New York, Macmillan, 1988, p. 561.

⁹ David Weissband, “The Reading From *On Being Human Religiously*,” Oct. 8, 2000. Aug. 20, 2007. www.uurockford.org/sermons/2000.05.htm.

in the poem "Let me Enjoy," whose title foretells its contents. The speaker vows to enjoy the earth "Because the all-enacting Might / That fashioned forth its loveliness / Had other aims than my delight." He does not care about what is called paradise. Even "if such should be," the speaker states, "I will lift glad, afar-off eyes / Though it contains no place for me."¹⁰ Hardy's complete disregard for the Christian religion can be inferred in the speaker's conviction that paradise is not for him.

The decision to shun everything Christian is also the subject of the poem "The Respectable Burgher: On 'Higher Criticism.'" As the title of the poem suggests, the poem is a critique of the stereotype mode of biblical interpretation. Walford Davies explains that the subtitle of the poem refers to efforts that "sought to submit the Bible to rational interpretation based on the disciplines of history, linguistics and Science." The poem, he adds, satirizes the excesses of such interpretation as the tendency of "middle-class dependence on the literal reading of the Bible."¹¹ Though the satire in the poem appears to be light-hearted, the poet's resolve at the end of the poem is blunt. He insinuates that everything being equal, one could say:

That Pontius Pilate acted square,
That never a sword cut Malchus' ear.
And (but for shame I must forbear)
That — — did not reappear!
-Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
All churchgoing I forswear;
And sit on Sundays in my chair,
And read that moderate man Voltaire.¹²

To make his criticism resounding, Hardy uses caesura for emphasis. For instance, he involves the reader in his line of argument when he leaves blank spaces for the reader to complete. In my opinion, the two spaces refer to Jesus Christ. The poet's preference of reading Voltaire to churchgoing is not unconnected with the

¹⁰ SP, p.47.

¹¹ SP, p. 240.

¹² SP, p. 32.

latter's humanist sentiments. As Brian Wilkie and James Hurt put it, Voltaire urged individuals to "crush infamy," by which he probably "meant all forms of intolerance and dogmatism, especially religious...and moral as well...that oppress mankind."¹³ The last quatrain of the poem justifies the Hardy-Voltaire reversion as it conveys the poet's stance vis-à-vis churchgoing. He "forswears" any churchgoing again because the church doctrine is dogmatic and insensitive to human needs in the here and now.

In "The Impercipient," the poet dissociates himself from the rest of the congregation. He describes it ironically as a "bright believing band" whose faith is just mere "fantasies" and whose "shining land" (paradise) is "mirage-mist" to him. The image of "mirage-mists" suggests doubt and illusion. After the series of rhetorical questions, the speaker declares his willingness to stay permanently out of the Cathedral because his presence does not remedy his condition in any way. In the third and fourth stanzas, the poet's humanist stance is more glaring. He contends that:

Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know; since it be
That he who breathes All's Well is these

Breathes no All's-Well to me,
My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity!¹⁴

The speaker acknowledges that believers find fulfilment in God. But he wonders why the same God who "Breathes All's Well" to other people "Breathes no All's not Well" to him. Hardy might have been expressing his personal frustration. In this vein, the poem has psychological undertones. In the light of Freudian psychology, the poem is therefore a vent where poet's frustrations in life are expressed. In life, Hardy's wishes were never fully fulfilled to his utter

¹³ Brian Wilkie and James Hurt, "Voltaire" in *Literature of the Western World: Neoclassicism through the Modern Period*, Vol.II.2nd ed. New York, Macmillan, 1988, p.357.

¹⁴ SP, p.35.

satisfaction. He lost most of the people that were very dear to him, for instance, Elisabeth Bishop, Tryphena Sparks and his favourite sister, Mary. In love, his relationship with Emma was not satisfying till her death in 1912; above all, he had no child and was constantly ill.

The above shortcomings did not only play negatively in Hardy's psyche; they also strengthened his humanist convictions. This situation explains why Hardy's persona in the above poem decides to bear his troubles without complaint since God is insensitive to his plight. Hardy uses the image of a bird deprived of wings to justify his rejection of God through the speaker's cry of anguish, "O doth a bird deprived of wings / Go earth-bound wilfully!" Naturally, the joy of a bird is in flying. Without wings, that desire is stifled, and the bird is forced to go "earth-bound" against its wish. In a like manner, God has not shown any mercy to Hardy. Thus, he is bound to question the authenticity of His existence and to embrace a humanist philosophy. Besides the poet's personal experiences, the philosophy of his era made him question God's existence.

Hardy goes contrary to Christian religiosity again in the poem "God's Funeral." The poem describes a funeral procession to a burial ground where God is about to be buried. The last stanza of the poem is an outburst of thoughts that express a major worry about the relationship of God with human beings. God is said to be a "man – projected figure" with a striking similarity with man. Another worry is the origin of the idea to create "one whom we can no longer keep alive?" Taking the cue from Nietzsche's thought, Hardy is insinuating that humans created God and now they have killed God. The reason for killing God is discernible in the calamities that befell humanity at the close of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century. Hardy makes it clear in the poem "A Plaint to Man" that God was "framed" out of the human necessity to overcome despair "in the minds of men when shadows scare". This view justifies the fact that God is a "man – projected figure." Since he was created to help humanity overcome despair and He has failed in that very duty, then humanity has to kill him probably by seeking other alternatives, one of which is the god within as suggested in stanza two, the god of loving – kindness. For loving – kindness to flourish, humanity must

do away with cruelty. This explains why even God, who is a symbol of loving – kindness needs to be tutored against cruelty as is the case in the poem “God’s Education.” The title of this poem, like that of the previous one, signals controversy. God cannot be educated, neither can He die. However, Hardy sees a need to educate God on matters of insensitivity and wickedness.

In the poem “God’s Education,” the persona narrates how he witnessed an act of cruelty, probably committed by God. He begins by saying that he saw God “steal the light away” from His victim’s eye. Thereafter He went ahead to take away the lady’s “Lily tints and rose”; such acts led to the victim’s death. Then the speaker is so crossed with God’s behaviour that he questions the *raison d’être* behind such inhuman treatment. The last words of the speaker are a condemnation of what he considers to be God’s cruelty as he remarks, “we call that cruelty-/ we, your poor mortal kind.” By placing humans on a par of mortality with God, suggests Hardy’s anthropocentric orientation.

From the above poems, if human beings decide to kill God, in Hardy’s opinion, it is because God has not lived up to expectation. He has failed in the very duty for which He was created. Consequently, humanity must turn to the god within - the God of loving-kindness. The act of educating God against cruelty is, therefore, in line with the doctrine of “loving-kindness.” Hardy’s doctrine is reminiscent of William Blake’s view in the poem “The Human Abstract” that humanity will be void of pity “if we did not make somebody poor/And mercy no more could be/if all were as happy as we.” To attain this humanist level, people have to rethink their stance vis-à-vis the god/man binary.

The Humanist Link in Graves’s Poetry

Graves is no less an advocate of the dethronement of God as Hardy is. Although his poems do not overemphasise the helplessness of human beings in a doom-laden atmosphere, they, nevertheless, convey a general sense of loss of faith not only in God but also in the whole concept of Christian morality. Amongst some of the poems that reveal Graves’s religious scepticism are “The Worms of

History,” “Knowledge of God,” “Death of the Farmer,” “The Rainbow and the Sceptic,” “Song: To be less Philosophical,” “Brittle Bones,” “Christmas Eve” and “A Boy out of Church”.

In “The Worms of History,” Graves’s speaker declares, like Nietzsche, that God is dead. He insinuates that immediately after creation God died:

On the eighth day God died; His bearded mouth
That has been shut long flew open.
So Adam's too in a dismay like death-
But the world still rolled on around him,
Instinct with all those lesser powers of life
That God had groaned against but not annulled.¹⁵

Through the use of parody, Graves makes a mockery of the biblical assertion that after creating everything God rested. According to the book of Genesis, “By the seventh day God finished what he had been doing and stopped working. He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a special day by not working.”¹⁶ The parody of the above excerpt is rendered more evident by the pathetic portrait of God – an aged man with a “bearded mouth” that “flew open” at death. Although Adam's mouth opens in dismay, it evokes a sense of likeness between God and man, whom God created in his own image. The poet seems to question why Adam should be grieved, by God's death, which is a non-event since the world still rolls on, careless of its creator's demise. On a hopeful note, the speaker observes that “excellence” still strives to overcome the influence of instinct and all those lesser powers of life.”

God died, not excellence his name:
Excellence lived, but only was God,
As for those lesser powers who played at God,
Bloated with Adams differential sighs
In mourning for expired divinity,

¹⁵ Robert Graves, *The Complete Poems* (Henceforth CP), Ed. Beryl Graves Dunstan Ward. London: Penguin, 2003, p.390.

¹⁶ *Good News Bible*, Genesis 2: 1-2, p.5.

They reigned as royal monsters upon earth.¹⁷

From a psychoanalytical perspective, “excellence,” symbolised by God, can be considered as the super ego while instinct and the “lesser powers” can be regarded as the id. In other words, these polar impulses reflect the civilised and savage impulse of human nature. To show that the savage impulse wields a considerable influence over human behaviour, Graves personifies them as kings or princes by insinuating that “they reigned as royal monsters upon earth.”

As if in response to Jean-Paul Sartre’s atheistic philosophy that sidelines God and upholds that “any ethical system must be based upon atheism, Graves in the poem, “Knowledge of God,” advocates a deistic philosophy.¹⁸ To Graves, even if God were alive, he must be dead now:

‘Has been’ and ‘is’ the seasons bind
(here glut of bread, there lack of bread)
The mill stones grumble as they grind
That if God is, he must be blind
Or if he was, is dead.¹⁹

“Glut of bread” and ‘lack of bread” are signals of God’s insensitivity to people. Graves questions the fact that while other people live in affluence, others lavish in abject poverty, yet it is said that before God all are equal. The disparity between the haves and the have-nots concurs with Hardy’s view that God breathes “All’s well” to others and not to him if at all he exists. Given that God is not able to alleviate peoples’ suffering, Graves, in a manner typical of the existentialists, obliges mankind to take up their responsibility in their hands rather than put their thrust on an insensitive and inexistent being. He urges:

Weep, sleep, be merry, vault the gate

¹⁷ CP, p. 91.

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, in Brain Wilkie and Hurts James. *Literature of the Western World* Vol. II. 2nd ed., New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988, p. 2022.

¹⁹ CP, p. 200.

Or down the evening furrow plod,
Hate, and at length withhold your hate,
Rule, or be ruled by certain fate,
But cast no net for God.²⁰

By urging man to “rule, or be ruled by certain fate,” Graves is suggesting that if people abandon themselves to fate, they will end up being controlled by fate. Even though he does not subscribe to the authority of the Nietzsche’s superman, Graves, like Nietzsche, pushes God to the background since he advises people to “cast no net for God”.

As in Hardy’s “Nature Questioning,” in which natural objects lament their suffering under the gaze of an insensitive “Vast Imbecility,” animals brood over their predicament in Graves’s “Death of the Farmer”. The Ass and the Ox observe that for quite some time, their condition in the farm is steadily deteriorating to the extent that at one moment they wished the death of their master. They say:

He’s done no good about the farm
These fifteen years, but only harm.
As well you know» the old Ass said
We often wish him dead.
How hopefully at his Son’s birth
We preached the reign of Heaven on earth
And sang him praises high and low.²¹

This is another poem in which Graves lashes out at Christian doctrine. This time around, his criticism is shrouded in allegory. The “Master” of the farm or the “farmer” as suggested by the title of the poem, represents God. The Ox and the Old Ass represent humanist ideology. The Ox and the Ass have realized that the Master cannot help ameliorate their woes. They even question the goodness of their master by insinuating that for fifteen years now they have known him

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ CP.221.

for his evil, consequently, they wish him dead. Thus, Nietzsche's idea that God is dead is reflected in Graves's the "Death of the Farmer".

Graves further ridicules the validity of Christ's "Messiahship," since contrary to expectation that the birth of Christ would usher in a new dawn of freedom, humanity is still enmeshed in webs of suffering. Signs of disillusionment can be detected in the animals' regret for singing praises in vain. Despite the futility of the son's redemptive mission, the animals maintain that:

Still to ensure domestic peace
Will tell the turkeys, ducks and geese:
'He rules omniscient and great,
Proof-armoured against fate'.
'Granted' we say, 'he's no more seen
Tending fat sheep in pasture green,
Or scattering at the break of morn
Largesse, profuse, of corn.'²²

The "turkeys," "ducks and geese" symbolize blind believers who adhere to any biblical creed without questioning. They are like the "bright believing band" in Hardy's "The Imprecipient." To such a category of people, preaching helps to ensure domestic peace. Considered in this way, Christianity is, therefore, not founded on the teachings of Christ but a mere ploy to subdue human instincts - a kind of superego. As the animals observe, their dead master is omniscient, controlling their hunger, thirst and sexual libido from "some glorious inner room."

The poet alludes to Jesus's role as a shepherd through the Ass's observation that "He's no more seen /Tending fat sheep in pastures green." Now that the shepherd is no longer there, the sheep are vulnerable to preying carnivores. Speaking about his shepherd's role in the Book of John, Jesus maintains that he is "the good shepherd who is willing to die for the sheep. When the hired man who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and the wolf scatters them."²³ This allusion is not intended

²² Ibid.

²³ Good News Bible. John 10. 11-12, p.133.

to credit Christ for his Lordship over humankind. It has satiric overtones. The Ass points out that the turkeys, ducks and geese gullibly believe that the master plays the role of a shepherd over them. Pathetically, the Ass observes that:

“The simple birds believe it true,
What now poor poultry, will they do?
Dazed to confusion, when the glum
Gloved undertakers come,

Tilting the coffin past the pond,
The Ricks, the clamps, the yard beyond,
Skirting the midden-heap with care,
Then out, we know not where.²⁴

Rather than show proof of commitment to guard his flock, the master abandons them to their own whims. Unfortunately, the helpless birds ignorantly believe that their master will still come to their aid. The Ass and the Ox are unable to anticipate the birds’ perplexity when the latter will fully comprehend their predicaments. The expressions, “poor poultry” and “dazed to confusion” convey the imminent helplessness of the birds when they realize that their master has absconded. This situation is intended to remind humanity that Christendom is grounded in blind belief, which can lead to embarrassment when one confronts the contrary of what he/she hoped for.

The image of the coffin and appearance of sad-looking funeral men (glove undertakers) evokes the idea of the death of God. The gloomy atmosphere that runs throughout the poem is made more impacting towards the end of the poem through the alliterative effects of /b/ in “birds believe, /p/ in “poor poultry” and “past the pound,” /g/ in “glum/Gloved” and /n/ in “know not”. The regular stanzaic pattern (two rhyming couplets per stanza) emphasizes the poet’s loss of faith in God.

²⁴ CP, p. 222.

On an agnostic note, Graves intimates, in the poem “The Rainbow and the Sceptic,” that it is difficult to know the nature of God and His decrees.

‘Decrees of God? Of One Prime Cause?
Predestinate for men,
Whose only knowledge of such laws
Is change and change again?

Made free or fated, what care I
In truth’s grand overthrow?
Since knowledge is but folly’s spy
It is not sane to know.²⁵

God is depicted in the poem, as an alien being whose interest seems to centre only on making rules that stifle human liberty. The poet apparently questions the usefulness of such decrees for humanity. In the second stanza, he gives up the desire to understand the nature of God’s being because the more he struggles to know, the less knowledge he gets. Given the stringent nature of the laws, the poet regrets that “Freedom is knocked blind.” Consequently, he wonders if “God can change His mind.” The poet’s wondering is typical of Socratic scepticism and the humanist connective which Fred Edwords’s highlights in the following words:

Another aspect of the Secular Humanist tradition is scepticism. Scepticism’s historical exemplar is Socrates. Why Socrates? Because after all this time he still stands alone among all the famous saints and sages from antiquity to the present. Every religion has its sage...Every one of these individuals claimed to know the absolute truth. It is Socrates, alone among famous sages, who claimed to know nothing. Each devised a set of rules or laws, save Socrates. Instead, Socrates gave us a method—a method of questioning the rules of others, of cross-examination...For these reasons Socrates is the quintessential sceptical humanist. He stands as a symbol, both of Greek rationalism and the humanist tradition that grew out of it.²⁶

²⁵ CP, p. 214.

Fred Edwords. “What is Humanism.”

In line with Socratic thought, Graves's agnosticism can be justified by the failure of Christianity to provide humanity with concrete solutions to his numerous problems. If Christianity were true to its words, then their belief in the brotherhood of people would have prevented the holocaust that plagued the modern society. This explains why the speaker of Graves's poem is left more confused as a voice cautions him in the following words:

...beyond all this, rest content
In dumbness to revere
INFINITE God without event
Causeless, not there, not here,
Neither eternal nor time-bound,
Not certain, nor in charge
Unconcealed by the cosmic round
Nor crushed within its range.²⁷

People are called upon to accept the reality of the fact that the nature of God cannot be known just as it is difficult to draw the line between the colours of a rainbow. Though in the biblical context the rainbow symbolizes God's covenant with humankind that He will never destroy the world with water, Graves uses the symbol to illustrate that God's nature is indeterminate. That is why he remarks that God is "causeless, not there, not here." The poet's argument has affinities with the ideas of William James. In one of his lectures, the philosopher posits that "The vast literature of proofs of God's existence drawn from the order of nature, which ... seemed so overwhelmingly convincing, today does little more than gather dust in libraries, for the simple reason that our generation has ceased to believe in the kind of God it argued for."²⁸ He further argues that even if we are convinced that such a being exists, "we cannot make clear by words either to others or to ourselves"²⁹.

www.americanhumanist.org/Humanism/what_is_humanism. Accessed October 20, 2014.

²⁷ CP, p. 215.

²⁸ William James, "The Realities of the Unseen" in *Varieties of Religious Experiences*. (1901), New York, Doubleday, n.d. p.74.

²⁹ Ibid.

As in “The Rainbow and the Sceptic,” Graves’s agnostic attitude is also expressed in “Song: To be less Philosophical.” In this poem, the persona calls out:

Listen you theologians
Give ear you rhetoricians
Hearken, you Aristotelians,
Of the Nature of God, my song shall be.

Our God is infinite
Your God is infinite
Their God is infinite
Of infinite variety.³⁰

The various categories of people to whom Graves addresses his message are called upon to pay adequate attention to the nature of God. The choice of the target groups is not par adventure. Theologians dedicate their lives to the study of God and religion. Rhetoricians are gifted in persuasive or impressive discourses. Aristotelians approach knowledge from a logical perspective. These categories are, therefore, in one way or another concerned with knowledge of God. Contrary to the above stance, Graves argues that inasmuch as God is infinite, He can equally be considered as finite:

God is also finite,
God she is also definite
He, she, we, they. You, each and it
Of finite omnipresence.³¹

Apart from the view that God is finite, the poet raises doubts about God’s gender when he refers to Him as she. Furthermore, He is equated to human beings, when referred to as being “of finite omniscience.”

³⁰ CP, 293.

³¹CP, p. 293.

Finally, the poet's anthropocentric sentiments and his humanist link are more evident in his view that anybody who thinks that God is more special than him/her is mad. He states emphatically:

You are also mad, quite mad,
To imagine you are not God.
Goddamit, aren't you a spirit
And your ministers a flaming fire?³²

Graves's opinion that a human being is God strengthens his agnostic view. Yet, it has a bearing with a biblical passage on the final judgment in which Jesus explains that by clothing, feeding and housing anybody, one is indirectly doing it to God.³³ This implies that God can appear in any form – as a man, a woman or a child.

Conclusion

The forgone discussion highlighted the humanist tendency to dethrone God from the Christian dogma position of absolute sovereignty. Hardy and Graves's rejection is precipitated by the failure of Christianity to live up to the realities of its creed. In a newspaper article, Giles N. Forter draws an analogy between the rejection of God in the contemporary world and the lack of space to accommodate Christ in Bethlehem when he was about to be born. The complaints that the inns were full were symbolic of the reaction of those who will turn their backs on Jesus and reject his offer for salvation. Giles elaborates that, "a saddening majority" in the modern world, "continues to refuse to welcome Christ the saviour," instead "falling before magical worldviews and pervading superstitions.

Many repudiate God and religion to the point of abandoning them because God and religion are incompatible with scientific progress and a new kind of humanism."³⁴ This view is concordant with Tapp's humanist view that "there are no guarantees in our

³² CP, p. 294.

³³ Mathew 25.31-46

³⁴ Giles N. Forter, "Lamp for my Steps: No place for God?" *L'Effort Camerunais*, No. 410, August 1-13, 2007, p.15.

human history; no evidences of any transcendental hands (visible or invisible). Instead there are possibilities, brought into being by new ideas and human commitments to transformations.”³⁵

The new kinds of humanism that Forter alludes to are secular and religious humanism. These two offshoots of humanism focus on the social well-being of man in the here and now, ensuring that “doctrine is never allowed to subvert the higher purpose of meeting human needs.”³⁶ Hardy and Graves reject God and Christianity because of its sterile preaching. This is the reason why Hardy, in the poem “Christmas: 1924,” regrets that humanity desired peace, yet after “paying a million priest to bring it,” the result is that “After two thousand years of mass / We’ve got as far as poison gas.”³⁷ Hardy’s and Graves’s mistrust of Christian spirituality leads to the quest for fulfilment from other sources, especially on the exploration of human potentials.

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³⁵ B Tabb p102

³⁶ <<http://www.jcn/humanism.php4>>

³⁷ SP p31

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This book explores the symbiotic relationship between philosophy and culture. Every philosophy emerges as a reaction to, or as justification for a particular culture and it is for this reason that philosophy may differ from one culture to another. It argues that philosophy is an essential part of every culture. Philosophy is the means by which every culture provides itself with justification for its values, beliefs and worldview and also serves as a catalyst for progress. Philosophy critically questions and confronts established beliefs, customs, practices, and institutions of a society. As reflective critical thinking, philosophy is linked to a way of life; a form of enquiry intended to guide behaviour; a form of thinking that sharpens and broadens our intellectual horizon, scrutinizes our assumptions, and clarifies the beliefs and values by which we live. Philosophy helps to liberate the individual from the imprisonment of ignorance, prejudice, superstition, narrow-mindedness, and the despotism of custom. Culture constitutes the raw data, the laboratory from which philosophers do their analytic experimentation. Culture is considered as philosophy of the first order activity. The book maintains that any genuine global philosophy must include philosophical traditions from all cultures and regions of the world, as it is by seeking alternative philosophical answers to some of the thorniest problems facing humanity that we are most likely to find more lasting solutions to some global problems. In this commitment to a universal humanity, we cannot afford to depend on solutions from a single culture or from the most influential cultures.

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